Lessing's *Ernst and Falk, Dialogues for Freemasons*
A Translation with Notes

CHANINAH MASCHLER
St. John's College, Annapolis

Translator's Introduction

I

Lessing's *Dialogues for Freemasons* should be of interest to readers of *Interpretation* for at least three reasons:

1. Even if they have heard about Lessing's theological writings, they may believe that Lessing's thoughts on matters of religion are summed up in his *On the Education of Mankind* (viii. 489ff.).[1] Since that essay claims that the Old Testament is superseded (paragraphs 51–53) and speaks more than slightingly of the people of Israel as the "crudest and least manageable" of peoples (paragraph 8), Jewish readers have found it quite off-putting; all the more if they're sufficiently knowledgeable about churchly matters to notice that paragraph 73 "saves" the doctrine of the trinity, paragraph 74 the doctrine of original sin, and paragraph 75 the doctrine of vicarious atonement through the Son, as though to underwrite the Confessio Augustana of the Lutheran Church. Christian readers, if they don't care too much about *how* the articles of their faith are saved or *how* Paul's words in Galatians 3:23f. are put to work, take comfort from Lessing's essay. From what I've seen of the secondary literature, I gather that neither kind of reader is wont to pay attention to the warning superscript of the essay, a quotation from Augustine's *Soliloquies*: "All these things are, for identical reasons, true in some respects and false in some respects." And even supposedly less partisan "philosophic" readers of the essay, those who know—having read Hegel's *Early Theological Writings*—how greatly Hegel is indebted to Lessing's *On the Education of Mankind* for the idea of writing mankind's spiritual history as though it were a gigantic *Bildungsroman*, tend to overlook how enigmatic Lessing's essay is.[2]

1. Here and throughout roman numerals refer to volume, arabic to page in the Carl Hanser edition of Lessing's *Werke* (Munich, 1979). Henry Chadwick's *Lessing's Theological Writings* (Stanford University Press) contains a translation of the *Education* and is, as of this writing, still in print.

2. Learned readers may notice resemblances between what Lessing says about God as teacher and *Summa Theol.* I.ii.Q.106,107. But what is one to make of these resemblances, seeing that in its original context the prefatory passage from Augustine's *Soliloquies* has Reason (Augustine's interlocutor) speak of histrionics? May one not suspect Lessing himself of play-acting? All the more when one notices that Lessing *identifies* himself as the mere publisher or editor of the essay, not as its au-

The *Dialogues for Freemasons*, which deal openly in riddles, are somewhat more above board.

2. Acquaintance with Lessing, especially with his theological pieces, which constitute roughly a fourth of his *œuvre*, is bound to illuminate the writings of Leo Strauss. By this I do not mean that it is nice to know who influenced whom; rather, I mean that the manner and motives for Strauss' work become clearer when Strauss' gratitude to Lessing is taken seriously. As far as I know, Strauss refers to Lessing at greatest length in "A Giving of Accounts" (*The College*, Annapolis, Maryland, April 1970, p. 3). He writes:

> The classic document of the attack on orthodoxy . . . is Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise*. . . . I began a fresh study of it. In this study I was greatly assisted by Lessing, especially his theological writings, some of them with forbidding titles. .[3] Lessing was always at my elbow. This meant that I learned more from him than I knew at that time. As I came to see later, Lessing had said everything I had found out about the distinction between exoteric and esoteric speech and its grounds.[4]

---

thor (Preface, VII.489). My present opinion of *On the Education of the Human Race* (Chadwick's rendering of the title) is that it is warmed-over Spinozism, culled from the *Theologico-Political Treatise*. The central analogy of the essay—that Revelation is to Reason as being taken in hand by a teacher is to being self-taught—is so sketchily made out that the issue whether Chance or Providence rules human history is left undecided: Are we being taught that some human prophet-legislator-philosopher graciously provided the Bible as a "textbook" with "correct answers" to arithmetic problems so that even duller students might acquire the art of calculation (paragraph 76, VII.506)? Or are we meant to think that there really is something wonderful about the Bible, because it *steers toward*, and promises (Revelations 14:6; Jeremiah 31:31), an Eternal Gospel of Inwardness and, *in the meantime*, records the spiritual travails through which a portion of mankind has passed so that we, the heirs, by being given the *narrative* for study, need not *repeat* the experience of our predecessors but may more efficaciously advance to spiritual manhood? Or, finally, is there *neither* a Moses and Christ (or Mohammed) *nor* a *tradition-under-God* which "provides" for our betterment: The course that the nations traveled is the course that they *had to* travel, and the seemingly encouraging sayings that "God's superintendance is shown in everything, including our errors" (Preface, VII.489) and that "the shortest line isn't necessarily the straight one" (paragraph 91. VIII.509) means merely that the spiritual and moral realms are as determined as the physical?

3. Part II of the Translator's Introduction gives some of the passages to which Strauss here cryptically refers.

4. Upon reflection it seems important to supply the reader with the context of this citation. Strauss, after explaining why as a young man he believed that Heidegger's critique of Husserl had to stand, reports that what made him turn away from Heidegger was his moral teaching. " Despite his disclaimer, he had such a teaching. The key term is resoluteness, without any indication as to what are the proper objects of resoluteness." In the next paragraph, Strauss brings up the resurgence, in Germany, of theology. The middle term, I take it, between the Heidegger and the theology paragraphs, is supplied by Strauss' essay on Carl Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political* (a translation of which appears as appendix to the English edition of Strauss' *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*). The astonishingly vivid rhetoric of the essay on Schmitt gives even an innocent American an *experience* of the appeal of Nazi ideology for someone who is made to feel that life is contemptible without wholesouled dedication but who can no longer take religion seriously. That is, I imagine that Strauss took up anew with theology, and with Spinoza's critique of orthodoxy (Jewish and otherwise) because he wanted to examine whether and how the *religious* rather than *philosophic* answer to Schmitt could stand. Schmitt and the Nazis recognized that people want to be "taken out of themselves." Patriotism

Lessing is also mentioned in the "Correspondence Concerning Modernity" with Karl Löwith (*Independent Journal of Philosophy* IV. 1. pp. 105f.). There he is ranked, with Swift, as "the greatest exponent of the ancients' side in the *querelle* between Ancients and Moderns"; Strauss claims that Lessing and Swift "knew that the real theme of the quarrel is antiquity and Christianity . . ."; and that Swift and Lessing held that "ancient, that is, genuine philosophy, is an *eternal* possibility." The *Dialogues for Freemasons* themselves are spoken of in *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (see index entries under "Lessing").

3. A third reason for taking an interest in the *Dialogues for Freemasons* is this: Freemasonry is another name for the international society of men of letters which sought to carry out Bacon's program of establishing "the kingdom of man." The "conspiracy" of which d'Alembert spoke in the *Preliminary Discourse to the Encyclopedia*, and of which he said Descartes had been one of the leaders, is the Masonic conspiracy to undo the Middle Ages.[5]

The fact that Masonic lodges were also social clubs, drawing men together over good food and good drink, does not take away from other facts: Freemasonry was a counter order to the Society of Jesus. (This remained true through the nineteenth century. Thus, in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, they're shown to split the territory: The Jesuits get Ellen, the Masons get Pierre!) Its leading intellectual members, men like Diderot, in serving as advisors to princes, hoped to exert the kind of influence over rulers that the Jesuit father confessors to Catholic princes had—in the opinion of such as Leibniz (Riley, p. 136)—abused or failed to use. The lodges were gathering places for the transmission and dissemination of the

---

is one way; religion another; the search for truth a third. If religion is *passé* and the search for truth is for the few, what is left except patriotism? The fact that Barth, who had the honor of being fired by Hitler, is mentioned in connection with orthodoxy, confirms this reading. Compare Kant's footnote on "respect" in the *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (a title better rendered as *The Founding of the Metaphysics of Morals*), pp. 17f. of the Bobbs-Merrill LLA ed.

5. Bobbs-Merrill LLA ed., p. 50: "He can be thought of as a leader of conspirators who, before anyone else, had the courage to rise against a despotic and arbitrary power and who, in preparing a resounding revolution, laid the foundations of a more just and happier government, which he himself was not able to see established." In *Discourse* II (Gilson ed. p. 11), Descartes mentions that he did his meditating while in Germany, where the wars "that still are not over" had brought him. He also mentions, in passing, that he was returning from the coronation of "the emperor," without calling that emperor by name. It was Frederick of Bohemia, the Protestant rival of the Catholic Duke Maximilian of Bavaria for the throne of the Holy Roman Empire. The war that Descartes is talking about is the Thirty Years War. Isn't it queer that young, Jesuit-educated Descartes left his Catholic homeland to serve the Protestant heir to William the Silent, Maurice, as army engineer, but then, come to Germany, offers his services to the Catholic Maximilian; yet later, he returns to Protestant Holland and settles down in Leiden "in order to be near the Princess Elizabeth of the Palatinate, eldest daughter of the unfortunate Elector Frederick"? Elizabeth is the Princess to whom the *Principles* are dedicated, and who is referred to *with all her titles* in the Letter of Dedication.

Frances Yates' *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972) is the only book I know that has tried to make sense of this queer string of facts (the facts themselves are reported in Baillet's *Vie de Monsieur Descartes*). Frances Yates even wonders whether Descartes joined Queen Christian of Sweden's court in order to plead Elizabeth's case there.

new sciences—Copernican astronomy, alchemical-chemical lore, mathematics, Newtonian mechanics. The Masonic lodges were used to collect funds for the furtherance of scientific projects. Even though a pantheist substitute religion was brewed from the writings of Jakob Boehme and from Hermetic tracts under Masonic auspices, nevertheless, the fight against superstition, against "the world bewitched,"[6] was one of their grand undertakings.

All of the activities mentioned are, in a broad sense, educational. Did the Masons also have a direct hand in political uprisings, did they advocate and themselves participate in the overthrow of rulers? They have been so accused.[7]

There is no single answer, partly because there are all kinds of political turnover[8] and partly because, despite broad agreement among Masons the world over that the Kingdom of Darkness (see *Leviathan* Part IV) must be made to yield to the Kingdom of Light, different tactics and even different interpretations of what constitutes the Kingdom of Light were endorsed at given times in given

6. So runs the title of a book by the Dutch author Balthasar Bekker, which Lessing intended to translate.

7. In a letter to Washington dated June 22, 1798, John Adams writes: "Many of my best friends have been masons. . . . Such examples would have been sufficient to induce me to hold the Institution and Fraternity in esteem and honor as favorable to the support of civil authority. The public engagement of your utmost exertions in the cause of your country and the offer of your services to protect the fair inheritance of your ancestors are proofs that you are not chargeable to those designs the imputation of which, in other parts of the world [e.g., France and Holland] has embarrassed the public mind with the real views of your society" (quoted in Philip A. Roth, *Masonry in the Formation of our Government*, Wisconsin, 1927, p. 51). On the differences between "moderate" and "radical" Freemasonry (roughly, George Washington *vs.* Tom Paine), see Margaret C. Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons, and Republicans* (George Allen & Unwin, Boston, 1981) and, for a brief summing up, Jasper Ridley, *Garibaldi* (Viking, New York, 1976), pp. 47f. For an elaborate statement and defense of the thesis that the American as well as the French Revolutions were "made" by Freemasons, see Bernard Faÿ, *Revolution and Freemasonry: 1680–1800* (Little, Brown, 1935). That Freemasonry was involved in the Decembrist Uprising in Russia of 1825 is briefly indicated in J. N. Westwood's *Endurance and Endeavor: Russian History, 1812–1980* (Oxford University Press, 1981). That something like the communist party's "cell structure" was attributed to Masonic societies is shown by Wilkie Collins' novel *The Woman in White*; cf. G. K. Chesterton's short story, "The Man who was Thursday." Norman Cohn's *Warrant for Genocide* (Harper, 1966) shows how those intent on staving off "modernity" fused fears of a Masonic "conspiracy" with older myths about the Jew as anti-Christ. The pseudo-document that was held to "reveal" that anti-Christ, Freemasonry, and Jewry are one—the so-called *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (which are again in circulation in the Middle East)—is a blatant forgery. What needs explaining is the fact that such nonsense could have acquired so much power over the imagination of Russians, Frenchmen, Americans, Englishmen, Spaniards, Germans. Cohn's book goes far toward furnishing such an explanation. But he does not, perhaps, sufficiently attend to the fact that it is quite true that the shared Masonic creed so dilutes Christian doctrine that the distance between Jew and Christian (or, for that matter, Jew, Christian, and Moslem) *is* lessened "in principle." As Frank E. Manuel observes in his *Portrait of Newton* (Harvard University Press, 1968, p. 373), "there are passages in the *Irenicum* manuscripts (Keynes ms. 3, folio 5 of Newton's theological writings at the King's College Library at Cambridge) so latitudinarian that the distinction between the Mosaic and the Christian dispensation is virtually abolished."

8. Certainly Edmund Burke, who was a Mason, thought so: He supported the American Revolution vigorously and argued against the French Revolution (see *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Bobbs-Merrill, 1955).

countries and at diverse individual lodges.[9] My present opinion is that early eighteenth century British Freemasonry (which is where, in a certain sense of the words "begin" and "Freemasonry," one must begin the history of the society) was *royalist* and *socially conservative*.[10] It was royalist because the leaders of the society were fearful of a return to any sort of Cromwell; it was socially conservative in that the men who designed the Masonic society were mindful of Ulysses' speech (in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* I.iii) about the consequences of "shaking degree or taking it away."

But these two choices—the political and the socioeconomic—were, in my opinion, made in a Hobbesian spirit, by men who thought they knew and were committed to teaching that heaven and earth are made of the *same* "catholic matter," and that just as there is no "quintessential" difference between superlunar and sublunar bodies, so there is no "natural" distinction between rulers and ruled. Support of kingly rule would then mean support of a postfeudal centralized regime sufficiently strong to prevent reversion to theocracy (Roman Catholic, Calvinist, or any other) on the one hand, or to the state of nature and perfect leveling (in death) on the other.

Everything I've said so far about the Masons sounds (whether one approves or disapproves) straightforwardly rational. But what about the rumor of all manner of mystery-mongering in Masonic lodges? What is one to make of the weird initiation rites that Goethe and others describe? How does the mumbo-jumbo of Isis and Osiris, of which we hear in the *Magic Flute*, fit in with the new science and the hatred of superstition? The story becomes murky because the *world* (which, after all, includes human beings) is murky, not *just* because information hasn't been thoroughly assimilated.

On the one hand the Masonic lodges fight fire with fire, as some readers of Maimonides say Moses did when he substituted less dangerous and less debasing superstitions for more—the tabernacle with empty throne for the calf, the sacrificial ram for the child. Religion was deemed necessary to cultivate, in ruled and rulers *both*, those restraints upon the passions, but also, those ambitions and that confidence, without which there cannot be a stable social and political order. The Grand Masters behind the Grand Masters reached back for spiritual exercises, stories, and symbols of non-Christian provenance (many of which had been made available by Ficino's translations of Hermetic writings) partly because of their vivid memories of the terrible sufferings caused by the Christian religious wars; but also, I suspect, because they deemed the Christian vision of man inherently at odds with politics.

9. By "different tactics" I mean, for instance, those differences between Hobbes and Spinoza that are discussed by Hilail Gildin in "Spinoza and the Political Problem" (Marjory Grene, ed., *Spinoza*, Doubleday, 1973). By "different interpretations of what constitutes the kingdom of light" I mean that some made a monarchist and others a republican choice.

10. This opinion is chiefly based on reading the Anderson *Constitution* of 1723, Heinrich Schneider's *Quest for Mysteries* (Cornell University Press, 1947), Margaret C. Jacobs' *The Newtonians and the English Revolution, 1689–1720* (Cornell University Press, 1976).

On the other hand, it seems also to be true that some in the circle around Newton who figured in the organization of the Grand Lodge of London in 1717 and thereafter, including Newton himself, were not uncomplicated atheists who valued religion strictly as an instrument of social control but complicated heretics: they kept the Church of England going because they held that it fostered obedience and unanimity among the ruled and a sense of limitation in the rulers. But they also believed that there *is* some religious truth other than the official one.

II

In 1770 Lessing had accepted a call from Duke Charles of Brunswick to come to Wolfenbüttel there to superintend the Ducal Library, the Herzog-August-Bibliothek, famous throughout Europe.

A few days after his arrival in Wolfenbüttel, he came upon the manuscript of a major medieval work on the sacrament of the eucharist—Berengard of Tours's *De Sacra Coena adversus Lanfrancum* (ca. 1070)—which seemed to give support to a Lutheran interpretation of the eucharist (though contemporary scholars claim that Berengard's was more nearly a Zwinglian understanding of the Lord's Supper). Lessing published an annotated edition of it in the fall of that year. On October 25, 1770 he writes a letter to his fiancée (Eva Koenig), then residing in Catholic Vienna, from which some have inferred that Lessing sought to ingratiate himself with the religious authorities:

> On the next Vienna Index of Prohibited Books you will no doubt find the title listed. You have no idea what a lovely odor of orthodoxy I am acquiring among the Lutheran theologians here. You had better be prepared to hear me proclaimed a veritable pillar of the church. Whether that quite suits me, and whether I may not soon lose their approval, time will show.

But Lessing was hardly very clever in his own behalf. So it seems to be much more likely that he was, being a genuine scholar, excited to find so important a manuscript. He took his job as librarian seriously, consistently so: He welcomed outside scholars, solicited their letters of inquiry, and in 1773 started a scholarly journal—*Contributions to History and Literature: From the Treasures of the Ducal Library at Wolfenbüttel*—in which he would write answers to such queries as well as make available the library's manuscript holdings to the reading public at large.[1]

In the first and second issue of the new journal, he published some heretofore unknown writings of Leibniz'—Leibniz' dissenting "Preface" to Ernest Soner's "Theological and Philosophical Demonstration that Eternal Punishments of the

1. See v.556f. for Lessing's description of the Journal's purposes and v.948f. for a list of the materials published in it between 1773 and 1781.

Impious do not prove God's Justice but rather His Injustice" and Leibniz' "Defense of the Trinity by means of New Logical Observations" (the latter a reply to Andreas Wissowatius' "Critique of the Doctrine of the Trinity").

Lessing, who all his life had a penchant for protecting and defending "outsiders," had in the 1750s begun to write what he called *Rettungen* ("rescues" or "pleas in defense") of even wildly unorthodox authors, like Cardanus (1501–1576): His brother Karl reports that Lessing intended to publish some of Cardanus' works along with selected pieces of Bruno's and Campanella's (VII.726).[2] Why would he now, in the 1770s, publish and argue in behalf of Leibniz-in-the-role-of-bulwark of the old-time religion?

The question may be answered in a preliminary way when Lessing writes:

> I am directing attention, not so much to the truth that is being defended, as to the man who is defending it, his attitude of mind and his reasons. Both have been misinterpreted and misjudged (VII.176).[3]

It is Lessing's even-handedness that has confused his admirers: He judges men according to the reasonableness of their plans and arguments, which is why he writes, albeit in behalf of an *open* heretic, not Leibniz:

> If *results* are taken to constitute the soul of history, if everything preceding the outcome is to be appraised strictly by the outcome, why then we might just as well dispense with history (VII.261).

Here, now, is Lessing's brief in Leibniz's behalf against the liberal theologians:

2. Cardanus, like Jean Bodin, wrote a dialogue in which a Pagan, a Jew, a Christian, and a Moslem discuss their several religions, inconclusively. For a splendid discussion of the works and hopes of the three men mentioned—Bruno, Campanella, and Cardanus—see Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, Vintage, 1969.

3. The idea of identifying and ranking human beings in terms of their "endeavor," their "ruling passion," the direction of their "will" is hardly distinctive of Lessing. How might one learn precisely in what way this differs from Goethe's romantic "*Wer immer strebend sich bemüht, den können wir erlösen*" and from Heideggerian *Entschlossenheit*? The place to begin is Republic IX (the description of the tyrannic man and of the choice among the three ruling passions); next comes Spinoza's *On the Improvement of the Understanding*; last a passage such as this from Lessing:

> Not the truth, in possession of which a man is or deems himself to be, but the honest effort that he has vested in finding it out constitutes a human being's worth. Because it is not the having but the seeking for truth that enlarges his powers, and it is in this alone—the expansion of his powers—that his continually growing perfection consists. Possession makes a man quiet, sluggish, proud.
>
> If God held all truth in his right hand and in his left the one ever-active passion for truth, albeit with the addendum that I would at any time and for eternity err, and spake to me "Choose!" I would devoutly grasp his left hand and say: "Father, give! Truth unadulterate is for no one except you alone" (from Lessing's first reply to Pastor Goeze, VIII.32f.; cf. Diogenes Laertius' *Lives*, VIII.8).

Observe that the usual citing of this famous passage transforms a choice that necessarily falls out Lessing's way, if made rationally, into *Sturm und Drang*.

Leibniz, in his search for truth, never deferred to prevailing opinions. But—from the firm conviction that no opinion could be embraced unless it were, from some perspective and in some sense, true—he would often have the courtesy to twist and turn an opinion until he succeeded in disclosing this perspective and making this sense intelligible. . He did no more and no less than did all the ancient philosophers in their exoteric disquisitions: He had regard for the kind of caution for which our most recent philosophers have become much too wise. He willingly put his own system aside and tried to lead any individual to the truth via the path on which he found him. . . Do I want to cast the worse suspicion upon him, that he was dissembling orthodoxy? Or am I seriously, and to the exasperation of our now philosophers, trying to make him come out orthodox? Neither! I admit that Leibniz treated the doctrine of eternal damnation very exoterically and that esoterically he would have expressed himself quite differently on the subject. But I do not want this to be thought of as anything except a diversity of didactic modes. I do not want Leibniz to be accused of self-contradiction—confessing to eternal punishment verbally and in public while secretly and at bottom denying it. That would have gone too far: No didactic politics, no desire to be all things to all men, would have rendered it excusable. On the contrary, I am convinced (and I believe I can demonstrate) that Leibniz was willing to put up with the vulgar doctrine of damnation, defended by the exoteric arguments for it, to which he was even willing to add, because he recognized that this doctrine was more nearly in accord with a great truth of his esoteric philosophy than was the contrary doctrine. But I must . indicate what great esoteric truth it was in consideration of which Leibniz believed that support of the common doctrine of eternal damnation is salutary. What else than the pregnant sentence that nothing in the world is insulated, nothing is without consequences, nothing is without eternal consequences? If, then, no sin can lack consequences, and these consequences are the punishments for sin, how can punishment fail to be eternal? How can the consequences ever stop having consequences? (VII.180–8; cf. Jerusalem's essay "On Liberty," VIII.427ff., published by Lessing in 1776).

Leibniz wasn't in the least intending to support the doctrine of the trinity by means of new philosophic arguments of his own. He only wanted to protect it against the accusation of being contradictory—internally or with undeniable truths of reason. He only wanted to show that such a mystery (*Geheimnis*) can stand up against all sophistic attack so long as it is treated as a mystery: A supernaturally revealed truth which we are *intended* not to understand is completely shielded from attack by its very unintelligibility. One hardly needs the dialectic strength and agility of a Leibniz to ward off the opponent's arrows by means of such a buckler (VII.216).

They turn him into an obsequious, self-seeking demagogue, who flatters the plebs in the realm of truth only in order to rule them tyrannically. 'Surely he could not'—they say—'have been unaware that reason stands with the small suppressed minority rather than with the reigning church. But to make sure he'd be supported by the majority, he pleaded its case. . . . He didn't believe a word of what he wanted all the world to be persuaded they must believe.'

Believe! Did not himself believe! Suppose, for a moment, Leibniz didn't believe a thing. Why should he, on that account, be less capable of considering the several opinions about Christ as so many different hypotheses according to which the several

> scriptural passages that speak of Christ are to be given a coherent interpretation? Does that prevent him from issuing a reasoned judgment as to which of these opinions is preferable, because at bottom he isn't convinced of any of them? (VII.219).

My guess is that much of what Lessing says in Leibniz's behalf in the just-cited passages should be used when trying to explicate Lessing's own writings, at least those of his writings that were composed after he had begun to immerse himself in the Leibniz papers which he found in the Wolfenbüttel Library (where Leibniz had been head librarian three generations or so earlier). Lessing may at one time have shared the liberals' disgust with and distrust of Leibniz the diplomat, Leibniz the courtier, but more intimate acquaintance with Leibniz' work, including his behind-the-scenes political maneuvering to prevent Britain's reversion to the Catholic fold (VIII.543), brought Lessing to realize that Leibniz and he were fellow workers for the education of mankind but that Leibniz' might be the wiser strategy.[4] Besides, the dominant Leibnizian metaphor of *point of view* must have been extremely congenial to Lessing, the dramatist: The sense of fellowship with Leibniz through this idea of perspectivalism may have opened Lessing's eyes to the logical difficulty of rationally persuading a believer in revealed truth to let go of the mainstay of his life.[5]

The year after the Leibniz *Rettung*, Lessing published two further pieces bearing on religion in his Wolfenbüttel Library Journal—"Some Reliable Information about Adam Neuser" and "On Tolerating Deists." As before, Lessing presents previously unavailable manuscript materials accompanying the texts with editorial comments in his own name.

Adam Neuser was a sixteenth century Lutheran pastor who had become convinced of the falsity of Trinitarianism and had come to doubt that Christian Sacred Scripture is any more sacred than the Koran (VII.269). Even Leibniz thought that Neuser had become a traitor to the Elector Palatine (Frederick), whose minister he was, by going over to the Turk (VII.234f.,267). Lessing found a letter of Neuser's, dated Constantinople 1574, from which he concluded that, though Neuser *played* with the idea of political defection, and was condemned for high treason, the verdict was unjust. Neuser did not *actually* defect until after the judicial ruling. But the court, so Lessing complains, identified religious *heresy* with *high treason* against the state and its ruler. Lessing's implicit warning, in taking up the case of Adam Neuser, is (I think), that precisely men of conscience will be

4. See Patrick Riley, *The Political Writings of Leibniz* (Cambridge University Press, 1972). Leibniz' description of Louis XIV's expansionist politics, in *Mars Christianissimus*, is especially noteworthy. Riley, on p. 202, refers to a book of Raymond Klibansky—*Leibniz' Unknown Correspondence with English Scholars and Men of Letters*—as throwing light on Leibniz' efforts to "secure the throne of Great Britain for the Electors of Hanover and to arrest the expansionism of Louis XIV." The *Nouveaux Essais*, Leibniz' study of and reply to Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding*, came out in 1765. I am suggesting that, for instance, Theophilus' (Leibniz's) long answer to Philalethes (Locke) in para. 4 of chapter XVI of Book IV must have weighed heavily with Lessing.

5. For Lessing, the chief function of tragedy is to enlarge our moral imagination, and instruct our powers of sympathy by giving them opportunity to try out diverse "perspectives."

strongly tempted to leave their intolerant fatherland for countries where they would not be obliged to hide their convictions from neighbors and relatives and where they would not be obliged to send their children to schools where the young are drilled on opinions that seem, to their father, "blind and corrupt superstition" (VIII.316).

By publishing Neuser's letter along with the plea for tolerating deists from which I quoted, Lessing manages to convey the message of chapter XX of Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise*. He makes it more vivid because he uses a historic example to which he gives the immediacy and drawing power of a tragedy.

So far I have not mentioned an important, and somewhat distracting, fact: Lessing withholds the name of the author of "On Tolerating Deists." The subtitle of the essay runs "Fragment by an unidentified author," with the past participle (*ungenannt*) ambiguous as to whether Lessing *won't* or *can't* name the author. But in the second paragraph of his introductory editorial note, Lessing claims that he has to guess at the author's identity, that the pages he publishes are culled from an untitled manuscript of unknown provenance; that strictly on the basis of internal evidence, he imagines "the Wertheimian translator of the Bible, Schmid" must be the author.[6]

The truth seems to be otherwise. Before coming to Wolfenbüttel, Lessing had been given the manuscript for a book entitled *Apology or Defense of Rational Worshippers of God*. Its author (a friend of Lessing's father), Hermann Samuel Reimarus, Professor of Oriental Languages at the Gymnasium in Hamburg, had allowed it to circulate privately, but had expressly advised against publication "until more enlightened days" (as is truthfully admitted by Lessing in Anti-Goeze VII, *Werke* VIII.247f.). After Reimarus' death, his daughter, Elise Reimarus, showed the manuscript to Lessing and, whether at her initiative or Lessing's, the two of them (they became very close friends) seem to have plotted to get the book published. Berlin publishers refused to take on the job. But as Librarian to the Duke of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, paid to glorify the Ducal House by exhibiting its scholarly treasures to the world, Lessing was protected against the censors![7] Hence the scheme to publish Reimarus' detailed critique of Revealed Religion in "fragments" ostensibly found in the Ducal Library.

After an interval of three years, the fourth issue of *Contributions to History and Literature* appears, entirely given over to "Further Selections from the Pa-

6. Schmid (J. Lorenz Schmidt, 1702–1749) also translated what has been called the Bible of English Deism, namely, Matthew Tindal's *Christianity as Old as the Creation*, and Spinoza's *Ethics*. As Lessing mentions in the passage where Schmid's name is cited, the then Duke of Brunswick had given the hunted man asylum: Schmidt died under an assumed name in Wolfenbüttel. I give these details to show how conscientiously Lessing lies when he does lie: In terms of their opinions, Schmidt and Reimarus are very close. Schmidt is at peace. Reimarus left a daughter and a son. Only the daughter wanted her father's book published.

7. The document exempting Lessing from the obligation to submit materials to the Censor prior to publication is copied at VII.799.

pers of the Unnamed Author, concerning Revelation": "On Ranting against Reason from the Pulpit," "On the impossibility of a Revelation in which All Men might Believe on Rational Grounds," "On the Israelites' Crossing of the Red Sea," "That the Old Testament was not Written to Reveal a Religion," and "On the Resurrection Narrative."

As usual, Lessing supplies editorial comments. He calls them "Counter Propositions by the Editor."[8] Reimarus' immensely learned and densely argued pieces, manifestly much affected by Spinoza's critique of revelation in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, steer toward applying Spinoza's type of critique to the New Testament.

Why does Lessing, so sympathetic to Leibniz' secretive ways, now publish Reimarus' outright attack on Holy Scripture? I do not think that Lessing is merely being coy when, in reply to his chief critic, Pastor Goeze, he writes:

> I admit, I am prone to an almost superstitiously high regard for any handwritten book, available only in manuscript, when I see that the author *wanted* to teach or give delight to the world. . I immediately react as would any human being deserving of the name if he came upon a foundling (VIII.239).

But clearly, this is not a sufficient answer. Still, it may lead in the right direction, precisely in speaking personally and in terms of the passions:

> I promise, I never again even *intend* to stay cold and indifferent about certain issues. If a human being is not permitted to become warm and partisan when he perceives clearly that reason and the written word are being manhandled, when and where *is* he permitted to be partisan? (VIII.101).

As far as I can see, this means that those who *have* an interest in the life of reason, must *take* an interest in protecting that life. This may call for different tactics given different circumstances. In Lessing's judgment, not the orthodox, who genuinely take their stand on faith, but the "neologians" of his day (the liberal protestantism against which Barth later fought) had become reason's most potent enemies. In Lessing's view, times had changed since Reimarus wrote. It was no longer fashionable openly to decry reason from the pulpit. The professional God-mongerers knew which side their bread is buttered on: "They elevate reason only to put it to sleep" (VII.461).

8. The tenor of these "counter propositions" can be gathered from a passage like the following: "Much might be said in reply . . . But even supposing there could be no rebuttal, what follows? The learned theologian would perhaps, in the end, be embarrassed, but need the Christian be? Surely not! At most, the theologian would be perplexed to see the supports with which he wanted to uphold religion thus shaken, to find the buttresses cast down by which he, God willing, had kept it safe and sound. But what does the Christian care about that man's hypotheses, explanations, demonstrations? For him it is a fact, something that exists, this Christianity which he feels to be true and in which he feels blessed. When the paralytic experiences the beneficial shock of the electric spark, what does he care about whether Nollett or Franklin or neither of the two is right?"

> Whether there can be and must be a revelation, and which of the many which claim to be it has the most probable claim, only reason can determine. But if revelation is possible and necessary, and the right one has been found out, reason can only regard it as further evidence for the truth of that revelation (rather than as an objection against it) if it discerns things in it that are beyond reason's grasp. Anyone who smooths out his religion so as to be rid of such things is as good as *sans* religion. Because what is a revelation that discloses nothing? . . So there is a *kind* of imprisoning of reason to the obedience of faith that does not depend on this or that scriptural passage but belongs to the very idea of revelation (VII.461f.).

Three hard issues, made all the harder because, though they can be distinguished, they cannot in practice be separated, seem to worry Lessing: (1) an issue of strategy, (2) an issue of morality, (3) an issue of logic.

The *logical* issue I touched on by translating the comment about mysteries being shielded from rational attack (p. 8 above). It became exacerbated when, via the passage where Lessing declares himself reason's champion, it appeared evident that faith and reason *both* are passions.

The *moral* issue is that not only the peace of the realm but the shapeliness and zestfulness of individual human lives may grow from their religious rootedness. Who has the right to dig the soil away?

The issue of *strategy* too is painfully alive for Lessing. Hence his sympathetic reading of Leibniz. I distinguish questions of strategy from questions of morality because I mean "best" in the sense of "most effective" when I speak of strategy. In publishing the Reimarus fragments so as to provoke Goeze and the rest of the theologians, Lessing has evidently decided (as he writes in the Preface to the final fragment "On the Objectives of Jesus and his Disciples") that "the fire should be furnished with air if it is to be put out" (VII.494). The justification for this choice of policy, supposing it *is* justifiable, is, I believe, given at VII.472.[9]

9. Reimarus—sounding much like the Moslem inventor of "critical history," Ibn Khaldun (see Bollingen paperback ed. of Rosenthal's translation of the *Muqaddimah*, pp. 11–13) on the one hand and Harvey (in the argument that calculates how vast a quantity of blood would have to be produced from food in a short stretch of time if Galen were right) on the other—*proves the impossibility* of 600,000 men plus their women and children and cattle crossing the Red Sea in the allotted time. He adds, jokingly, "*daß man den Israeliten und ihren Ochsen und Karren nur keine Flügel gebe.*" Lessing, impersonating the orthodox, replies to this pleasantry of Reimarus' ("Now don't you be giving wings to the Israelites and their oxen and carts") as follows:

> But doesn't God himself say at Exodus 19:4 that he carried the Israelites from Egypt on eagle's wings? What if language provides no words to express the features of this wonderful swiftness except this metaphor? Allow me to see more reality (*Wirklichkeit*) even in a metaphor used/needed by God than in all your symbolic demonstrations.

Lessing continues:

> If an orthodox person replies in this way, how is he subject to rebuttal? You may shrug your shoulders at his answer, as much as you like, but you will have to grant him his position. That's the advantage had by a man who stays faithful to his principles, who would rather be faithful to principles even if they're not so well founded than not act and speak in accord with them. This

Lessing gets what he wants! Johann Melchior Goeze (1717–1786), Chief Pastor of Hamburg, in proceeding to the defense of his territory, shows his colors (VIII.102; 115f.; 224f.): Not truth, but obedience are threatened by the Reimarus fragments and, in particular, by undermining belief in the Resurrection. One may, however, well wonder whether it is all that easy to distinguish what *Lessing* claims the Pastor is defending, namely, his "territory," from what the *Pastor* says he is defending, the peace of the realm and the peace of heart and mind of the faithful.

Even before the publication of "On the Objectives of Jesus and His Disciples," Lessing is deprived of his exemption from censorship and must hand over the manuscript of Reimarus' *Apology*. Since the thesis of Reimarus' last and longest fragment is that Jesus and his disciples were rebels against the secular authority of his day, Goeze's fears that Reimarus provokes anarchy seem warranted.[10] That same year, 1778, Lessing publishes, anonymously, the first three of the five *Dialogues for Freemasons* translated below. The year thereafter he publishes *Nathan the Wise*. Finally, in 1780, again anonymously, the *On the Education of Mankind* appears. On February 15 of the next year he died, aged fifty-two. That year Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* appeared, ostensibly demonstrating the possibility of *natural* science and the impossibility of *rational* theology, if rational means natural.

---

acting consequently (translator's italics), on account of which one can anticipate how a human being would speak and act in a given case, is what makes a man of a man, what gives him character and perseverance—the great excellences of a thinking human being. Character and perseverance will, in time, even correct principles. Because it is impossible that a man act according to principles without his coming to realize their falsehood if they are false: If you do lots of calculating, you're bound to notice whether you've got your multiplication tables right or not.

So it is not orthodoxy, it is a certain cross-eyed, limping, wavering orthodoxy that is so disgusting. Disgusting, repellent, vapid. At least, that's how I must describe *my* sense of it.

What strikes me about this passage is that though an Aristotelian emphasis on "character" (*Nic. Eth.* II $105^{a}35$) has been given a Kantian tinting, it is conjoined with Peircian hopes for the *self-correctiveness* of conduct guided by "leading principles." (That Lessing wasn't all *that* confident of progress in the sense of self-correction is shown, for instance, by his early play, the *Mysogynist*: Its butt was married three times over and dropped his "principle" only when he was presented with proof positive of the error of the principle that the male is always recognizably the superior: His daughter-in-law-to-be must be declared the *equal* of her brother when she turns out to *be* that very brother, as her being dressed left side as her brother, right side as herself makes undeniably plain.) The import of the passage I cited is, to me, that if only people try to make clear to themselves *what* it is that they believe and *act* on these beliefs, then there is hope that error will be *weeded out*. It is not supposed that error can be *prevented wholesale*.

10. For a recent setting out of Reimarus' argument, see Joel Carmichael, "The Lost Continent . . ," *St. John's Review*, Autumn–Winter 1982/3, 73–84.

The Dialogues

DEDICATION

TO HIS SERENE HIGHNESS, DUKE FERDINAND

I too stood by the well of truth and drew from it. How deeply, only he can judge from whom I wait to be given permission to draw more deeply still. The people have long been languishing: They are dying of thirst.

His Highness' most obedient servant.[1]

If the ensuing pages do not hold the true *ontology* of Freemasonry, I want to be told which of the countless writings occasioned by that society gives a more exact idea of its *true nature*.* But if Freemasons of all denominations should welcome the perspective that is here shown as the only one from which sound

The notes to the translation selectively incorporate information supplied by von Olshausen, Paul Rilla, Joachim Krüger, and Heinrich Schneider in the Peterson and von Olshausen edition of Lessing's *Werke*, the Aufbau edition of the *Werke*, the Carl Hanser edition, and in Schneider's *Lessing: Zwölf biographische Studien* (A. Francke, Bern, 1951) respectively. There is a fine biography of Lessing by Adolf Stahr, *Life and Works of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing* (Boston, 1886). The *Lessing Yearbook*, published in the United States, contains articles of consistently high intellectual calibre.

*All italics are Lessing's, unless there is a note to the contrary.

1. The *Dialogues for Freemasons* are the only piece of writing of Lessing's marked by a dedication. To ask "why this dedication?" is probably tantamount to the question "why address Freemasons?" or, for that matter, "why bother to become a Mason?"

That Lessing asked to be "accepted" because he expected to learn "saving secrets" strikes me as incredible: Lessing was no Pierre Bezuhov (Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, book v and elsewhere). His brother Karl thought Lessing became a Mason because only thus could he obtain information that he needed to check out some scholarly guesses about the history of the society. I do not think one need attribute such singlemindedness to Lessing: Schneider shows that life in Wolfenbüttel was very lonely for Lessing; so he may well have joined for conviviality, when he found out that just about everyone at the Brunswick court was a Mason.

But not only in Wolfenbüttel–Brunswick, all over Germany, men who counted (or hoped to count) were Masons. The Masonic path was the one on which he "found" the leading members of the audience he had sought to address in his earlier writings. In short, Lessing may have held that being a member of the society would give him pedagogic advantages.

The man to whom the *Dialogues* are dedicated, Duke Ferdinand, brother to the reigning Duke, had been foremost in Brunswick Masonic affairs. It looks as though Lessing is reminding him where or how to lead. Particularly striking is the reference to the *people's* thirst for truth (*das Volk*), which I interpret in the light of an important passage in Anti-Goeze V (VIII.234–36), which comes to a head with the following remark:

> The meanest crowd, when it is rightly led by its superiors, becomes more enlightened, more decent, better in the course of time. But it seems to be a principle of certain preachers to stay put for ever in that moral and religious position in which their ancestors stood many hundreds of years earlier. They won't tear themselves from the crowd, but in the end the crowd tears itself away from them.

eyes catch sight of something genuine (whereas, placed elsewhere, untutored eyes glimpse nothing but a phantom), then the question arises why it has taken so long for someone to speak plainly.

Several things might be said in reply. But it would be hard to come up with a question more nearly like the one just uttered than this: Why did it take Christianity so long to produce systematically laid out manuals of instruction? Why have there been so many good Christians for so long who neither could nor would give a rational account of their faith? Indeed, such handbooks of Christianity as we now have might still be deemed premature (since faith itself has probably gained little from them), were it not that [certain?] Christians took it upon themselves to expound the faith in an utterly nonsensical way.

The application of these remarks can be left to the reader.

FIRST CONVERSATION

ERNST What are you thinking about, friend?

FALK Nothing.

ERNST You're so quiet.

FALK Who thinks when he is enjoying himself? And I am enjoying the lovely morning. So . . .

ERNST You're quite right.

FALK If I were thinking about something I'd be talking: No pleasure compares with that of *thinking out loud* with a friend.

ERNST I agree.

FALK If you have had your fill of taking in the fine morning, why don't you talk, if something occurs to you.

ERNST I've been meaning to ask you something for a long time.

FALK Ask away!

ERNST Is it true, friend, that you are a Freemason?

FALK That's the question of one who is not a Mason.

ERNST Admittedly. But give me a straight answer, are you a Freemason?

FALK I believe myself to be one.

ERNST That's the answer of one who doesn't feel quite sure of himself.

FALK But I am.

ERNST Then you must know whether, when, where, and through whom you became "accepted."[2]

FALK I know those things, but they don't count for much.

ERNST They don't?

FALK Who doesn't "accept" and who isn't "accepted"?

ERNST What do you mean?

2. Masonic jargon is, of course, inevitable. It gets worse in the Fourth and Fifth Dialogues.

FALK I believe that I am a Freemason, not because older Masons have accepted me into an official lodge, but because I understand and appreciate what and why Freemasonry is, when and where it has existed, what fosters and what hinders it.

ERNST And nevertheless you speak in such hesitant tones—"I believe myself to be one"?

FALK I've grown accustomed to that tone, not because of lack of conviction but because I don't want to stand in anyone's way.

ERNST You answer me as though I were a stranger.

FALK Stranger or friend!

ERNST You were accepted, you know everything—?

FALK Others too have been accepted and believe they know.

ERNST But could you have been accepted without knowing what you know?

FALK Yes, unfortunately.

ERNST How?

FALK Because many who "accept" others do not themselves know it, while the few who do *cannot* say it.[3]

ERNST But could you know what you know without having been accepted?

FALK Why not? Freemasonry isn't an arbitrary thing, a superfluity, but a necessity, grounded in the nature of man and of civil society. Consequently one must be just as capable of coming upon it through one's own reflection as under external guidance.

ERNST "Freemasonry isn't anything arbitrary"? Doesn't it involve words and symbols and customs every one of which might have been different? Mustn't it, consequently, be arbitrary?

FALK Sure. But these words, these symbols, these customs do not constitute Freemasonry.

ERNST "Freemasonry is a necessity"? How, then, did people manage before Freemasonry came on the scene?

FALK Freemasonry has always existed.

ERNST Then tell me, what is this necessary, this indispensable Freemasonry?

FALK As I indicated earlier, something of which even those who know it cannot speak.

ERNST A nonentity, then.

FALK Don't be hasty.

ERNST What I understand I can put into words.

FALK Not always, and often not in such a way that the words convey to others the idea I have exactly.

ERNST Approximately, if not exactly.

3. The "it" wants to be impenetrable. As Lessing wrote Duke Ferdinand on October 26, 1778, "I did not desecrate any secret knowledge. I only tried to convince the world that truly great secrets continue to lie hidden there, where the world had at last become tired of looking for them" (Heinrich Schneider, *Lessing, Zwölf biographische Studien*, A. Francke, Bern, 1951).

FALK Approximately the same idea would be useless or even dangerous here: Useless if it conveys less than the idea; dangerous if it holds the least little bit more.

ERNST Odd! If even the Freemasons who know the secret of their order cannot impart it verbally, how, then, do they spread their order?

FALK By deeds. They allow good men and youths whom they deem worthy of more intimate association to surmise, guess at, see their deeds—as much of them as is visible. The Masons' new intimates find these deeds to their liking and do the same.

ERNST Deeds? Deeds done by Freemasons? I only know of their speeches and songs—more prettily printed normally than they are thought or recited.

FALK As might be said of lots of other songs and speeches.

ERNST Or am I supposed to take the things they boast of in these songs as their deeds?

FALK If they aren't just boasting?

ERNST What are they boasting about, anyway? Nothing beyond what is expected of every good human being and decent citizen—that they're so friendly, so charitable, so obedient, so patriotic.

FALK Are those virtues nothing?

ERNST Nothing that would distinguish the Masons from the rest of mankind. Who isn't supposed to be friendly, charitable, and the rest?

FALK *Supposed* to be! (translator's italics)

ERNST Aren't there plenty of incentives and opportunities for such virtue apart from Masonry?

FALK Yes, but the Masonic fellowship gives men an additional incentive.

ERNST What is the good of multiplying incentives? Better to strengthen one to the utmost. A multitude of motives is like a multitude of gears in a machine —the more gears the more slips.

FALK I can't deny it.

ERNST Besides, what sort of "additional incentive" is this that belittles all others, casts doubt on them, gives itself out as strongest and best?

FALK Friend, be fair. Don't judge by the exaggerations and confusions of idle songs and speeches. They're the work of apprentices, callow disciples.

ERNST You mean Brother Speaker was talking nonsense?

FALK I mean, the things that Brother Speaker was praising the Freemasons for are obviously not their deeds since [whatever else you may say of him] he doesn't talk out of school, and deeds speak for themselves.[4]

ERNST I'm beginning to see what you are driving at. Why didn't they occur to me sooner, those deeds, those telling, I'd almost call them shouting, deeds: Freemasons don't merely support one another, and powerfully so, as would the

4. Lessing's word here is "plaudern," familiar—in its Masonic tinting—from Mozart's *Magic Flute*: "Ich plauderte und das war schlecht" says Papageno toward the end of Act II.

members of any association. They work for the public good of whatever state they are members of.

FALK For instance? I want to be sure you're on the right track.

ERNST For instance, the Freemasons of Stockholm, didn't they establish a foundling hospital?

FALK I hope that the Freemasons of Stockholm showed their mettle at other occasions.

ERNST What other occasions?

FALK Just others.

ERNST And the Freemasons of Dresden, who employ poor young girls as lacemakers and embroiderers, to bring down the size of the foundling hospital!

FALK Ernst, need I remind you of your name? Be serious!

ERNST Well, seriously, consider the Freemasons of Brunswick, who provide poor boys of talent with drawing lessons.

FALK What's wrong with that?

ERNST Or the Freemasons of Berlin, who support Basedow's Philanthropin.

FALK The Masons support Basedow's teacher training institute?[5] Who told you that fable?

ERNST It was all over the newspaper.

FALK You read it in the newspaper? I won't believe it till I see Basedow's handwritten receipt. And I'd want to be sure that it was made out to *the* Freemasons, not just to some Freemasons in Berlin.

ERNST Why, don't you approve of Basedow's institute?

FALK Me? I approve wholeheartedly.

ERNST Then you won't begrudge him such financial assistance?

FALK Begrudge? Quite the contrary. Who is a stronger well-wisher of Basedow than I?

ERNST Well, then. You're becoming incomprehensible.

FALK I suppose so. Anyway, I was unfair: Even Freemasons may undertake something albeit not as Freemasons.

ERNST Does that hold for all the rest of their good deeds as well?

FALK Perhaps. Perhaps all the good deeds that you mentioned to me just now are, to use scholastic jargon for brevity's sake, their deeds *ad extra*.

ERNST How do you mean that?

5. Johann Bernhard Basedow (1723–1790) was a German educational reformer who established a teacher training institute in Dessau in 1774. He hoped it would become "*Schule der Menschenfreundlichkeit und guter Kenntnisse für lernende und junge Lehrer*" ("a school where young and apprentice teachers would acquire *philanthropia* and good learning"). Basedow started out as a student of theology and had come under Reimarus' influence. His ideas on education were also affected by Comenius (snatches of whose writings crop up word for word in certain Masonic documents) and by Rousseau's *Émile*. Though the Philanthropin itself folded in 1793, it served as a model for other such schools. Lessing, in the *Literaturbriefe*, expresses strong reservations about Basedow (v.165ff.,285ff.).

FALK Perhaps these are the eye-catching things they do to draw the multitude's attention, and which they do solely for this reason.

ERNST To gain respect and toleration?

FALK Could be.

ERNST What about their real deeds then? You keep silent?

FALK Perhaps I have already answered you? Their real deeds are their secret.

ERNST Ha ha! Yet another one of those things that can't be put into words?

FALK Not very well. But I can and am permitted to tell you this much: The Freemasons' real deeds are so great and of such long range that centuries may pass before it can be said, "This was their doing." Yet they have done everything good in the world, note well, in the *world*. And they continue to work for all the good that is to be in the world, note well, in the *world*.

ERNST Come now, you are pulling my leg.

FALK Indeed not. But look—there goes a butterfly that I must have. It's a Monarch! I want to be off, so I quickly tell you just one thing more: The true deeds of the Freemasons aim at making most of the deeds commonly called good superfluous.

ERNST But these [the Masons' true deeds] are themselves good?

FALK None better. Think about that for a bit. I'll be right back.

ERNST Good deeds whose object is to make good deeds superfluous? That's a riddle. I refuse to guess at riddles.[6] I'd rather stretch out beneath this tree and watch the ants.

6. I have not cracked the riddle. My guess is that in speaking of "Gute Taten welche darauf zielen gute Taten entbehrlich zu machen" Lessing's Falk covertly and ambiguously refers to: (a)human works of charity (*Wohltätigkeit*); (b)church sacraments; (c)the supreme, divine, work of charity—the sacrifice of Christ. My guess depends on hearing the word *opus* underneath the German *Tat*. *Opus* is the operative word in Luther's dispute with the Church of Rome; *Opera* is what Rome calls the Sacraments; *Non opinionem sed opus esse cogitent* is what Bacon asks for in the selection from the Preface to the *Instauratio Magna* that Kant used as frontispiece to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Lessing himself introduces the Latin word in the Second Dialogue, when he speaks of the Masonic task as an *opus supererogatum*: He is appropriating a word which, in the traditional religious context, refers to the works of extraordinary merit done by Christ and the saints, upon which the rest of the faithful draw. My guess amounts to this, that the *philosophes* or Masons of highest degree replace Christ and the Saints and ought eventually themselves to become superfluous.

This interpretation of Falk's riddle sounds overly ingenious. But aren't falcons known for their far-sightedness and penetration? Call to mind the tremendous emphasis on works and efficacy in modern philosophy. There is more to it than Pelagianism. And it is not just a "bribing" of the multitude through technology. The writings of Frances Yates (*Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, London, 1964; *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972; *The Valois Tapestries*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959) and Edgar Wind's *Pagan Mysteries of the Renaissance* make me doubt the plausibility of separating the New Science from the New Politics; make me also doubt the suggestion of *some* commentators that the men who (like Bacon, Galileo, Stevin, Descartes, and later the authors of the Encyclopedia) demanded *works as pledges of the truth of words* were in their own estimation in any way lowering epistemic standards. Galileo's *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems* (Stillman Drake tr., University of California, 1961) pp. 58ff. makes palpable that power, *virtú*, is felt to be what is *really real*.

We shrink from passages like the Baconian one in Diderot's *Encyclopedia* (p. 158 Bobbs-Merrill

SECOND CONVERSATION

ERNST What's been keeping you? You didn't catch your butterfly after all?

FALK It lured me from bush to bush, down to the brook. Suddenly, it was on the other side.

ERNST There are such seducers!

FALK Have you thought it over?

ERNST What? Your riddle? I won't catch my butterfly either. But I shan't worry about mine from now on. I tried once to talk to you about Freemasonry. That's enough. You're obviously just like the rest of them.

FALK The rest of them? They don't say the things I say.

ERNST They don't? So there are heretics among the Masons too? And you are one of them? But heretics always have something in common with the orthodox. And that is what I meant.

FALK What *did* you mean? (translator's italics)

ERNST Orthodox or heretical—Freemasons all play with words, provoke questions and then answer without really answering.

FALK Is that so? Well, then, let's talk about something else, since you tore me away from my pleasant condition of mute θαύμα (*staunen*).

ERNST Nothing is easier than getting you back into that condition. Just lie down beside me and look.

FALK At what?

ERNST At the life and activity in and around and on top of this ant heap. Such busyness—and such order! Every one of them fetches and carries and pushes, and yet none is in the other's way. Look, they even help each other!

FALK Ants live in society just like bees.

ERNST And theirs is a society more wonderful than the bees', because there is none in their midst to bind them together or to rule over them.

LLA ed.), where technological inventions are sized up as harmless when compared to political enterprises (see also p. 50 of the article on Commerce and pp. 4,5,17 of the article on Art). They strike us as frighteningly naïve. But it would be false to contend that it was the hatred of superstition or the love of man and *not* the love of truth that prompted the overwhelming interest in works.

The Dutch physicist and engineer Simon Stevin, from whom Descartes learned so much via Beeckman, used the motto *Labore et Constantia* as imprint for his books. Sometimes a picture of a hand holding a pair of drawing compasses accompanies the motto, sometimes a picture of a man with a spade and a woman with a cross staff goes with it. The Masons had the motto (I do not know how old it is) "Par le travail on vient à bout de tout."

These mottoes and, if Frances Yates' reading of one portion of the hermetic tradition and Bruno is right, *that* "prescientific" portion of the Renaissance, seek to undermine the teaching that was held to undergird the power of the Kingdom of Darkness—the teaching that the human stain can be washed away *only* through the ordained priest's power of administering the Sacraments. But this undermining of Christian doctrine is, as I see it, an expression of the new metaphysics as well. It is not just a rejection, but also an embracing, of *nature as active*.

FALK Order can exist even without government?

ERNST If every individual knows how to rule himself, why not?[7]

FALK I wonder whether human beings will ever reach that stage.

ERNST Hardly.

FALK What a shame.

ERNST Indeed.

FALK Get up. Let's go: They're going to crawl all over you, I mean the ants. I want to ask you something. I don't know your opinion on this at all.

ERNST On what?

FALK Civil society, for human beings in general. How do you size it up?

ERNST As a great good thing.

FALK No doubt. But do you consider it a means or an end?

ERNST I don't follow.

FALK Do you think that men were made for the state or rather states for men?

ERNST Some, it seems, want to maintain the former, but the latter is probably truer.

FALK I think so too. States unite human beings in order that—through and in these associations—every individual human being may better and more securely enjoy his share of happiness. The totality of the shares of happiness of the members is the happiness of the state. Apart of this there is no happiness. Every other so-called happiness of the state, for the sake of which some of the members, no matter how few, are said to *have to* suffer, is a mere cover-up for tyranny.

ERNST I would rather not say that so loud.

FALK Why?

ERNST A truth which each construes according to his own situation is easily abused.

FALK Do you realize, friend, that you're already a demi-Freemason?

ERNST Who? Me?

FALK Yes, since you admit there are truths better not spoken.

ERNST Yes, but they *could* be spoken.

FALK The sage is *unable* to say things he had better leave unsaid.

ERNST As you wish. Let's not get back to the Freemasons. I don't want to know about them anyway.

FALK I beg your pardon. But at least you see that I'm willing to tell you more about them.

ERNST You are making fun of me. All right, civil society and political organization of whatever sort are mere means to human happiness. What follows?

FALK Means only! And means of human devising, though I won't deny that nature has arranged things in such a way that men would have had to invent political organization sooner or later.[8]

7. Cf. Adeimantus in *Republic* II, 367 " we would not now be guarding against one another's injustice, but each would be his own best guardian. "

8. Cf. *Politics* I.1253^{a}30.

ERNST Which is why some have held that civil society is a natural end: Because everything—our passions and our needs—leads there, they believed that civil society and the state are ultimate ends of nature. As though natural teleology didn't bear on the production of means! As though nature were more interested in the happiness of abstractions like *state, fatherland* and such (translator's ital.) than in the happiness of flesh and blood individuals.

FALK Fine. You're meeting me half-way. The next thing I want to ask you is this: Admitting that political constitutions (Staatsverfassungen) are means, and means of human invention, would you say that they alone are exempt from the vicissitudes of human means?[9]

ERNST What do you have in mind when you speak of "the vicissitudes of human means"?

FALK What makes them different from divine, infallible means.

ERNST Namely?

FALK That they are not infallible: Worse than being ineffectual, they often produce results clean contrary to their design.

ERNST Give me an example, if you can think of one.

FALK Ships and navigation are means toward distant lands, but they are also to blame for many a man's never arriving there.[10]

ERNST Those who suffer shipwreck and drown? I see what you are driving at. But the reasons for a constitution's failure, why it cheats so many individuals of their happiness, are known. There are many types of constitution, one better than the next; some very inadequate, blatantly at odds with their purpose; the best may yet be undiscovered.

FALK Forget about that. Suppose the very best constitution imaginable were invented. Suppose everybody the world over had accepted it. Don't you think that even then, under this best constitution, things that are extremely disadvanta-

9. Why this emphasis on the *instrumental* status of political organization? Cf *Summa contra Gentiles* II.75, Al Farabi *Political Regime* and *On the Attainment of Happiness* (p. 39 and p. 61 in Lerner and Mahdi, *Medieval Political Philosophy*, Cornell University Press, 1963) with the opening sentences of Hobbes' *Leviathan*. Aristotle wanted to have it both ways—a ὁρμὴ "toward this kind of community exists naturally in all" and also "there was someone who contrived the community, and who thus wrought the greatest of goods." What kind of community was it that he fashioned? According to Al Farabi, one that somehow mimes the rank order that exists in the cosmos at large. But what becomes of this idea of a "natural" order within the political sphere when the new physics has homogenized heaven and earth? The artificiality of the social and political order becomes exacerbated. The old saying about politics being the architectonic art moves much closer to meaning that it is a *productive* art, because the bricks have no ὁρμὴ to assemble in this rather than that way. I believe that in Plato and Aristotle ἀρχιτεκτῶν means something like the "superintendent of works."

10. Cf. *Republic* and countless other texts about the ship of state, the pilot's governing art, etc. The question that I presume the two friends, Falk or Falcon, the far-sighted one, and Ernst or Earnest, the serious one, to be considering is this: Whether, even supposing that the ship which sails out beyond the pillars of Hercules on the frontispiece to Bacon's *Novum Organum* brings back a new science of statecraft, from America, the efficacy of that science would, no matter how much better it is than what was had heretofore, always be limited.

geous to human happiness would necessarily occur, things of which men in the state of nature would have been utterly ignorant?

ERNST If such things occur under the supposedly best constitution I infer it isn't the best after all.

FALK Assuming that a better one is possible? Well, take that better one and repeat the question.

ERNST You seem to me to be disguising with spurious subtlety that you assume all along that every instrument of human invention, including political constitutions, must be flawed.

FALK I'm not just assuming it.

ERNST Show me.

FALK You want examples of the harm that comes necessarily of even the best constitution? I could mention ten at least.

ERNST One will do for a start.

FALK We are supposing that the best constitution has been invented and that all mankind live under it. Does that imply that all human beings in the world make up one single state?

ERNST Hardly. Such an immense state would be ungovernable. So it would have to be divided into many smaller states, all governed with the same laws.

FALK People would still be Germans and Frenchmen, Dutchmen and Spaniards, Russians and Swedes, or whatever they happen to be called?

ERNST Certainly.

FALK Wouldn't each of these states have its own interests, and the members of each state have the interests of whatever state happens to be theirs?

ERNST Obviously.

FALK These state-interests would often clash, wouldn't they, just as they do now? So wouldn't the citizens of two different states be just as unable to encounter one another without a burden of prejudice and suspicion if they lived under the best imaginable constitution as a German and a Frenchman, or a Frenchman and an Englishman today?

ERNST Very probably.

FALK When a German meets a Frenchman or a Frenchman an Englishman, he does not meet him simply as a human being, a fellow man to whom he is drawn because of their shared nature. They meet as German and French, French and English. Aware of these national differences, they are cold, distant, suspicious even before they have had any personal dealings.

ERNST You're right, unfortunately.

FALK Doesn't that prove that the means for uniting human beings, for assuring their happiness through association, also divide them?

ERNST I suppose so.

FALK One step further; these several states, many of them, will have climates that are very different; consequently they will have quite different needs

and satisfactions; consequently they will have different moral codes; consequently different religions. Don't you think?

ERNST That's an enormous step!

FALK Wouldn't people still be Jews and Christians and Moslems and such?

ERNST I don't dare deny it.

FALK In that case, Christians, Jews, and Moslems alike will continue to deal with each other as before, not as one human being with another, but as a Christian with a Jew, a Jew with a Moslem: Each will claim that men of *his* type are spiritually superior to men of other type, and they will thus lay the foundation for rights that natural man could not possibly claim to be possessed of.[11]

ERNST It's very sad, but what you say is probably quite true.

FALK Only "probably true"?

ERNST I would think that, just as you supposed all the world's states to have one constitution politically, so one ought to suppose them of one religion. I can't imagine how they could be the same politically without religious uniformity.

FALK Me neither. Anyway, I proposed the hypothesis of the one best political constitution only to prevent your evading the issue [of the possibility or impossibility of a perfect constitution].[12] Political and religious uniformity the world over are equally impossible. The steps of our argument were: One state, several states. Several states, several political constitutions. Several political constitutions, several religions.

ERNST Yes, that's how things look.

FALK That's how they are! Consider next the second misfortune which civil society, quite at odds with its end, gives rise to. Civil society cannot unite men without dividing them, nor divide them without erecting walls or digging ditches to keep them apart.

ERNST Those chasms are so dreadful, those walls often so impossible to climb!

FALK I must add a third: Civil society doesn't just divide human beings along national and religious lines. Such division into some few major parts each of which would for itself be a whole were surely better than no whole whatever.[13] But civil society divides on and on within each such partial whole.

ERNST Explain.

11. "Nimmermehr" in "Rechte die dem natürlichen Menschen nimmermehr einfallen könnten," is ambiguous. It is not clear whether the natural man of whom Falk is speaking belongs to the past, the future, or neither. Lessing wrote a brief and inconsequential review of Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality* and his friend Mendelssohn translated that *Discourse*.

12. Cf. Leibniz on ours being the best of all possible worlds. He did not mean that it is perfect, as Voltaire seems to have construed him. He meant that the very conception of a perfect world is self-contradictory and that ours is the best of the possible systems. The Lessing–Mendelssohn essay "Pope as Metaphysician" (III.633–70), in which Leibniz' *Theodicy* is discussed, is worth reading. For instance, the differences between Pope's "whatever is, is *right*" and Leibniz' dictum are studied; also, the possibility that for every "progress" there is "regress" is examined.

13. Strauss' way of using the word "whole" probably has something to do with his affection for Lessing.

FALK Do you believe that a state without differentiation of social classes is conceivable? Let it be a good or a bad state, closer or further from perfection, it is impossible for all its citizens to share the same [political, social, and economic] conditions. Even if they all participate in legislative activity, they cannot all have an equal share in it; at least, not an equal direct share. So there are going to be upper and lower classes. And supposing that originally each citizen got an equal share in the state's wealth, this distribution cannot be expected to last beyond a mere two generations: One man will know better than another how to increase his property; or a poorly administered estate may need to be shared out among more heirs than a well-administered one. Soon there are bound to be rich and poor.

ERNST Evidently.

FALK Consider now, are there many evils that are *not* due to such social differentiation? (translator's italics)

ERNST If only I could contradict you! But why do I want to, anyway? To unite human beings one must divide them, and keep them divided. Granted. That's how it is. It can't be otherwise.

FALK *That*, precisely, is my thesis.

ERNST But what's the point of dwelling on this conclusion? Are you trying to make civil society hateful to me? Do you want me to regret that people ever conceived the idea of uniting into states?

FALK Do you know me so little? If the only good gained from civil society were that human reason can be cultivated there, and there alone, I would bless it even if the evils it produced were greater by far than the ones mentioned.

ERNST As the proverb has it—If you want to enjoy the fire you must expect to put up with the smoke.

FALK Quite. But granting that fire makes smoke unavoidable, should one therefore prohibit the invention of chimneys? Is the fellow who invented them to be called an enemy of fire? You see, that's what I was after.

ERNST What? I don't follow you.

FALK And yet the image was most suitable.[14] If human beings cannot be united into states apart from such divisions as we spoke of, does that make the divisions good?

ERNST Why, no.

FALK Does it make them sacred?

ERNST How do you mean that, "sacred"?

FALK I mean, so that touching them ought to be prohibited.

ERNST Touching with what end in view?

FALK This, of not letting them gain more ground than is absolutely necessary, of cancelling their ill effects as much as possible.

ERNST Why should that be prohibited?

14. Cf. *Republic* VII? Of course, fire and sun imagery proliferate in Hermetic, Rosicrucian, and Masonic writings. Think back on the *Magic Flute*, and on Campanella.

FALK But it can't very well be enjoined either, at least not by the civil law, since the civil law holds only within the boundaries of the state, and what is wanted is precisely something that crosses these. So it can only be an *opus supererogatum* [a work of supererogation; see note 6]. That the wisest and best of every state freely undertake this task beyond the call of duty can only be wished for.

ERNST However ardent, it must remain merely a wish.

FALK I believe so. May there be men in every state who are beyond popular prejudice and who know exactly when patriotism ceases to be virtuous.

ERNST I join you in your wish.

FALK May every state contain men who are not the creatures of the prejudices of the religion they were raised in, who do not believe that everything which they regard as good and true must be good and true.

ERNST May it be so.

FALK May every state contain men who are not dazzled by high position and not put off by low, men in whose company the nobleman gladly stoops and the lowly confidently rise.

ERNST May it be so.

FALK What if this wish of ours were fulfilled?

ERNST Fulfilled? To be sure, here and there a man like that might turn up.

FALK I don't mean just here and there and now and then.

ERNST In certain epochs and certain regions there might even be several such men.

FALK What would you say if I told you that today men like this exist everywhere; that from now on there are always going to be such men?

ERNST Please God!

FALK What if I told you, further, that they do not live ineffectually dispersed, like the Church Invisible?

ERNST Happy dream!

FALK I'll get right to the point—these men that we are speaking of are the Freemasons.

ERNST What's that you're saying?

FALK That the Freemasons may be these very men who have taken on the job of re-establishing human solidarity, *including* this in their proper business.

ERNST The Freemasons?

FALK Yes, I'm saying they count it as *part* of their business.

ERNST The Masons?

FALK I beg your pardon. I forgot that you don't want to hear about them. Look—we're being called for breakfast. Let's go.

ERNST Wait a minute, you say the Freemasons. . . .?

FALK Our conversation brought me back to them against my will. I do apologize. We're bound to find more deserving matter for conversation once we join the breakfast crowd. Come!

THIRD CONVERSATION

ERNST All day long you have been avoiding me in the crowd. But I've tracked you down to your bedroom.

FALK Do you have something important to say to me? I'm too tired for a mere chat.

ERNST You're ridiculing my curiosity.

FALK Curiosity?

ERNST Yes, which you so artfully *piqued* this morning.

FALK What were we talking about this morning?

ERNST The Freemasons.

FALK Well, what about them? I hope I didn't give the secret away when I was tipsy on the Pyrmont mineral water.

ERNST The secret which, you say, no one can give away?

FALK All right. That restores my peace of mind.

ERNST You said something about the Freemasons that came unexpected, struck me, made me think.

FALK What was that?

ERNST Come on, stop teasing me. I'm sure you remember.

FALK Now that you mention it, it does come back to me. That's why you were so absentminded with your men and women friends all day?

ERNST Right. I won't be able to get to sleep until you've answered at least one question of mine.

FALK The question?

ERNST How can you prove, or at least support, your claim that the Freemasons have these great and worthy aims?

FALK Did I speak to you of their aims? I was not aware of it. You were quite at a loss when I asked what might be the Masons' true deeds. I wanted to draw your attention to something that deserves to be worked at, something that doesn't figure in the dreams of our clever political theorists (*staatskluge Köpfe*). Perhaps the Masons are working on it. Perhaps they're working in that vicinity. I merely wanted to cure you of the prejudice that every spot fit for building has been identified and occupied and that all construction work has been duly meted out.[15]

ERNST Wiggle as you please: From your speeches I conclude that the Free-

15. See VIII.39ff.,117,125 for some more architectural images. The frequency and centrality of architectural metaphors like "laying the foundations," "clearing away the underbrush," "setting the cornerstone," "city planning," "architect's design" in the makers of modernity deserves to be noticed. Observe that in Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, as well as in Anderson's Constitution of 1723, God is an architect. Remember that one section of Kant's *Critique* is called the "Architectonic of Pure Reason." That modern epistemology is intimately connected with the "ruinously inapplicable metaphor of firm foundations" (Bradley's phrase), and that this metaphor (which can be found equally in Descartes and Peirce!) seemed so natural and unavoidable, especially when "worked" in conjunction

masons are people who have freely chosen the responsibility of working against the unavoidable evils of the state.

FALK Such a conception of their undertaking will at least not dishonor them. Hold on to it. But understand it right. Do not include things that don't belong. We're talking about the unavoidable evils of the state, of any state, not about the evils that go with this or that particular state of a given constitution. The healing and alleviating of evils native to a particular state the Freemason leaves to its citizens, who must venture and risk themselves according to their citizen-insight and courage. Evils of a quite different, higher kind are the object of the Mason's efforts.

ERNST I understand. Without the evils that concern the Mason there could be no happy citizens. These are not the evils that cause citizens unhappiness.

FALK Right, the Freemasons mean to—how did you put it?—work against the unavoidable evils.

ERNST Yes.

FALK "Work against" may be too strong a word, if it is understood to mean "undo them." These evils cannot be undone. It would destroy the state. They should not even be made apparent now to those who do not yet perceive them as evils. At most they can be mitigated, by distantly stirring up this perception in people, by allowing it to germinate and send out shoots, by clearing away weeds and thinning out the new plants. Now do you understand why I said that, whether or not Freemasons have always been at work, centuries may pass before one could say "That is what they wrought"?

ERNST Yes, and I now also understand the second part of the riddle—"good deeds that are to make good deeds superfluous."

FALK Fine! Go, then, and study these evils. Get to know them all. Weigh their mutual influences. This study will reveal things to you which, in days of dejection, will seem irrefutable arguments against providence and virtue. [But] this discovery, this illumination, will give you peace and make you happy, even without being *called* a Freemason.

ERNST You say the words "being called" with so much emphasis.

FALK Because one may be something without being called it.

ERNST All right. I understand. But to return to my question, which I need only rephrase: Since I now know the evils which Freemasonry combats . .

FALK You know them?

ERNST Didn't you enumerate them for me?

FALK I merely named a few of them, by way of test, just those which are obvious even to the most nearsighted, just a few of the most uncontested and most comprehensive. But there are many such evils less obvious, more debatable, and less comprehensive that are just as sure and inevitable.

---

with all the cognate architectural imagery, because it ministered to *all* the pressing demands for overhaul—moral, political, religious, scientific—deserves to be shown in detail.

ERNST I limit my question to the evils you have yourself named. Prove to me that the Freemasons have these in mind. You are silent. Are you thinking?

FALK Not about how to answer your question. But why do you want to know?

ERNST Will you answer my question if I answer yours?

FALK Yes, I promise.

ERNST I asked for evidence that the Freemasons think as you say they do because I know and fear your ingenuity.

FALK My ingenuity?

ERNST Yes. I am afraid you're selling me your own speculations for fact.

FALK Thanks a lot!

ERNST Did I insult you?

FALK I suppose I ought to be grateful that you call "ingenuity" what might have been given quite a different name.

ERNST No, no. Only, I know how easily a clever person deceives himself, how readily he attributes plans and intentions which they never thought of to others.

FALK But how do we infer that people have certain plans and intentions? Don't we reason from their several deeds?

ERNST How else? Which brings me back to my question—from what individual, uncontested deeds done by Freemasons can it be inferred that in and by their fellowship they mean to overcome the divisions among men of which you spoke? The unavoidable divisions within the state and amongst states. Show me that this is even *one* of their objectives.

FALK And that they mean to do this without threatening the individual state or the continued existence of a plurality of states.

ERNST I am glad to hear it. Look, I am not necessarily asking you to tell me of deeds. Oddities, idiosyncracies that spring from or lead to union among men would serve. You must have based your speculations on some such signs as I am asking for if your "system" is a hypothesis.

FALK You continue suspicious of me? But perhaps you will doubt me less if I cite a constitutional principle of Freemasonry for you.[16]

16. Lessing is referring to the Constitution of the Grand Lodge of London, ostensibly drawn up by the Reverend James Anderson (Presbyterian) in 1723, though Newton's friend and disciple, the ousted Huguenot John Theophilus Desaguliers (who wrote an allegorical poem entitled *The Newtonian System of the World, the Best Model of Government*; it is in the Harvard eighteenth century manuscript collection) may be its real author (Schneider, *Quest*, p. 14). The "First Charge" of the Anderson Constitution runs:

> Concerning GOD and RELIGION. A Mason is obliged by his Tenure, to obey the moral Law: and if he rightly understands the Art, he will never be a stupid Atheist, nor an irreligious Libertine. *But though in ancient Times Masons were charg'd in every Country to be of the Religion of that country or Nation, whatever it was*, yet it's now thought more expedient only to oblige them to that religion in which all Men agree, leaving their particular opinions to themselves. That is, to be good Men and true, or Men of Honour and Honesty, by whatever Denominations or Persuasions they

ERNST Which?

FALK A principle they have never kept secret and in accord with which they have always conducted themselves before the world's eyes.

ERNST To wit?

FALK To accept into their ranks any worthy man of fit character, without distinction of fatherland, religion, or civil condition.

ERNST Really?

FALK Admittedly, such a constitutional principle seems to presuppose men who already make light of national, religious, and social distinctions. The constitutional principle itself does not raise up such men. But mustn't there be nitrogen in the air for saltpeter [KNO_3 or $NaNO_3$] to accumulate upon the walls?

ERNST Yes.

FALK And may the Freemasons not have been resorting to a familiar ruse, that of openly practicing some of their secret objectives, so as to mislead such men as, driven by suspicion, are always on the look-out for something different from what stares them in the face?

ERNST Perhaps.

FALK Why shouldn't the artisan who can *make* silver deal in silver scrap, in order to allay the suspicion that he knows how to make it?

---

may be distinguished; whereby Masonry becomes the Center of Unition, and the Means of conciliating true Friendship among Persons that must have remain'd at a perpetual Distance.

The editor of the facsimile edition of the 1723 Constitution that I consulted, Lionel Vibert I.C.S. (Retired), Past Master of the Lodge of Quatuor Coronati, denies that there is any warrant in *earlier* Masonic charters for the sentence printed cursively in my citation. He invites comparing it to Montaigne's

> How could that ancient God more clearly accuse the ignorance of human knowledge concerning the Divine Being, and give men to understand that their religion was but a thing of their own contrivance, useful as a bond to their society, than in declaring, as he did to those who came to his tripod for instruction, that every one's true worship was that which he found in use in the place where he chanced to be (from the Apology of Raymond Sebond).

He does not comment on the 1723 charge as is. Jacob Katz, in *Jews and Freemasons in Europe, 1723–1939* (Cambridge, 1970) does:

> There is no reason to assume that the authors of the English constitution intended, in their universal tolerance, to provide for Jewish candidates in the flesh. Yet when such candidates did apply for admission, the principle was followed in practice. . At least some of these Jews sought to retain their own religious principles within the framework of the lodges. In 1756 an anthology of Masonic prayers appeared in print, among them to be recited "at the opening of the lodge meeting and the like, for the use of Jewish Freemasons." While the other prayers were addressed to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, the Jewish prayers contained nothing at variance with the Jewish tradition (pp. 15f.).

Historians who cite the remarkable exchange of letters between George Washington and the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island (with the ringing sentence IT IS NOW NO MORE THAT *TOLERATION* IS SPOKEN OF, AS IF IT WAS BY THE *INDULGENCE* OF ONE CLASS OF PEOPLE, THAT ANOTHER ENJOYED THE EXERCISE OF THEIR INHERENT NATURAL RIGHTS) sometimes fail to observe that Moses Seixas, the Warden of the Newport Hebrew Congregation, was a Mason (*Annals of America*, pp. 433f., neglects to report this fact).

ERNST Why not?

FALK Ernst, are you listening? You sound as though you were half asleep.

ERNST No, friend. But I have had enough, enough for tonight. Tomorrow very early I'm going back to town.

FALK Already? Why so soon?

ERNST You know me and ask? How long will it be before you wind up your mineral water cure?

FALK I only started it day before yesterday.

ERNST Then I shall be seeing you before you have finished yours. Farewell. Good night.

FALK Good night. Farewell.

NOTICE TO THE READER

The spark took. Ernst went and became a Freemason. What he thus learned, at first, is the matter of a fourth and fifth conversation, in which there is a parting of ways.

INTRODUCTION BY A THIRD PARTY

As is known, the author of the first three conversations had the manuscript for this continuation in hand, ready for print, when the entreating hint not to publish it reached him from on high (*den bittenden Wink. . . . Höheren Orts*). Yet he had earlier shown the manuscript of the fourth and fifth conversation to some friends who, presumably without his permission, had made copies of it. By a curious coincidence one of these transcriptions fell into the hands of the present publisher. He regretted that so many glorious truths should be suppressed and decided, *sans* hints (*ohne Winke zu haben*), to let it be printed.

If the desire to see light spread more widely about matters so important does not sufficiently excuse the liberty he has taken, nothing can be added in defense except that the publisher is not an Accepted Mason.

The reader will, however, notice that prudence and respect for a certain branch of the [Masonic] fraternity have prompted the publisher to delete some names that were written out in the manuscript.[1]

1. Of the three foregoing conversations Lessing wrote Duke Ferdinand on 19 October, 1778:

> Since I make so bold as to deem the first three of the conversations in question the weightiest, most laudable, and truest things that may ever have been written about Freemasonry, I could no longer resist the temptation to have them printed. (Schneider, *Lessing* . , 14).

There is no question, then, that Lessing both wrote and published them. The two conversations translated below, while published in Lessing's lifetime (Frankfurt am Main, 1780), had been held back by Lessing himself. I do not know who is responsible for publishing them and for writing the "Introduc-

FOURTH CONVERSATION

FALK Welcome, Ernst. Here you are at last. I concluded my mineral water cure ages ago.

ERNST And it agreed with you? I'm so glad.

FALK What's the matter? I don't think I ever heard "I'm glad" said so crossly.

ERNST I do feel cross, and very nearly with you.

FALK Why?

ERNST You tempted me to do something silly. Look, give me your hand.[2] What's that you say? You shrug your shoulders? That crowns it all!

FALK I tempted you?

ERNST Perhaps without meaning to.

FALK But I am still to blame?

ERNST The man of God tells the people of a land flowing with milk and honey, and you expect them not to yearn for it?[3] Expect them not to murmur when he leads them, not to this promised land but through barren wilderness?[4]

FALK Come now. The damage surely cannot be so great. Besides, I notice that *you have been laboring among the graves of our forefathers.*

ERNST Yes. But they were surrounded by smoke, not *flames.*[5]

FALK Then wait for the smoke to clear. Thereafter the flame will furnish light and heat.

ERNST The smoke will suffocate me before the flame gives me light, and others, I believe, better able to bear the smoke, will have the benefit of its warmth.

FALK Are you referring to those who positively relish the sting of the smoke so long as it rises from some rich kitchen that isn't their own?

ERNST Then you admit that you know these people?

FALK I've heard of them.

ERNST In that case, what prompted you to lure me by a fine show of things the shallowness (*Ungrund*) of which you knew very well?

FALK Your irritation makes you quite unfair. I'm supposed to have talked about Freemasonry with you without giving you to understand in more than one

---

tion by a Third Party." Von Olshausen reinserted the deleted names and made a few other corrections in the pirated 1780 version. He used the work done by Lessing's two friends, Friedrich Nicolai and Johann Georg Hamann.

2. Masons make themselves known to one another by special handshakes.

3. Exodus 13:5.

4. Exodus 15:22f.

5. "The graves of the forefathers" and "flames" seem to be Masonic symbols that aren't explained until the brother reaches the degree of Master Mason. Here and throughout, italics are Lessing's unless there is a note to the contrary.

way how pointless it would be for every decent man to become a Mason, not just pointless, harmful?

ERNST May be you did.

FALK I didn't tell you that the highest duties of Freemasonry can be fulfilled without bearing the name of Freemason?

ERNST I remember that you said that. But you know perfectly well that when my fancy spreads its wings and takes off there is no stopping it. I blame you only for showing it such luscious bait.

FALK Bait that you soon got tired of struggling for! Besides, why didn't you tell me of your intentions?

ERNST Would you have tried to talk me out of them?

FALK Certainly! *Who'd put a dapper boy back in leading strings merely because he occasionally stumbles*? I won't flatter you: You were too far along for me to hold you back. Even so, no exception could be made for you. All must enter by that way.

ERNST I would not be sorry to have entered upon it if I had higher expectations of the way remaining. Vain promises, vain promises, nothing but vain promises (*Vertröstungen*)!

FALK Ah, so they are already holding out promises to you. Of what?

ERNST You know Scottish Rites, the Scottish Knight.[6]

FALK Yes, of course. But what does the Scottish Knight need consolation for (*wessen hat sich . . . der schöttische Ritter zu trösten*)?

ERNST I'd dearly like to know!

FALK Your comrades, the other novices of the order, they don't know anything either?

ERNST They? They know plenty! They have such high hopes. One wants to make gold, the other wants to summon spirits, the third wants to revive the order of Knights Templar. You smile. Why do you merely smile?

FALK What else can I do?

ERNST Show your disgust with these blockheads.

FALK I would, except that there is one thing that reconciles me to them.

ERNST What?

6. I imagine that the promise refers to promotion to those "higher degrees," beyond the third degree of Master, that the Lodges of Strict Observance tacked on. According to Schneider (*Lessing* . . , 167), Higher Degree Masonry (which, oddly enough, reintroduced within the Masonic fellowship ranks and hierarchy due to genealogy or rank outside the Brotherhood instead of matching rank to merit qua progress in the craft) was brought to Germany by French army officers stationed in Germany during the Seven Years War. Chevalier Ramsay (1681–1743) is sometimes mentioned in connection with eighteenth century Higher Degree Masonry, and this is not entirely lacking in interest because he is linked to the "re-Christianizing" or even "Romanizing" that is said to have been encouraged by the Catholic Stuarts to counteract the Protestant Hanoverian influence in Masonic circles. The passage about the Scottish Knight's needing consolation *may*, then, refer to the Stuart loss of the English throne. I have no idea what connection, if any, there is between contemporary Higher Degree Masonry and the eighteenth-century variety.

FALK In all these reveries I detect a straining after reality, and all these wrong tracks nonetheless indicate where the true way leads.

ERNST Even the alchemy?[7]

FALK Yes. Whether gold can or can't be manufactured doesn't matter to me. But I am positive that reasonable men will want to be able to make it only on account of Freemasonry. And the one who should lay hold of the philosopher's stone would, that instant, become a Freemason. Isn't it remarkable that all reports about alchemists—alleged or real—bear this out?

ERNST What about the necromancers?

FALK I'd say roughly the same of them—spirits can't possibly listen to any human voice except that of a Freemason.

ERNST How can you say such things in so serious a tone?

FALK By all that is sacred, my tone is no more serious than the things themselves are.

ERNST Can it be so? (*Wenn das wäre!*) Where do you stand on the issue of the new Knights Templar, God willing?

FALK Heavens, *them*!

ERNST I've found you out! You can't come up with anything to say, because Knights Templar did once exist, whereas there may never have been anyone who succeeded at making gold or summoning spirits. It's easier to tell how Freemasons deal with creatures of the imagination than how they deal with real beings.

FALK I admit, either/or. There are only two alternatives.

ERNST If only one could be sure that at least one of them held true. Well, then, either these would-be Templars . . .

FALK Ernst, stop before you finish uttering yet another blasphemy (*Spötterei*). By my conscience, these, precisely these, are either securely on the right path or else so far from it that they should no longer even hope ever to reach it.

ERNST I'll just listen, since asking for explanations. . .

FALK Why don't you? For too long petty secrets have been made the mystery.

ERNST What do you mean?

7. Cf. Descartes, *Discours* I, toward the end (p. 41 Gilson ed.) and Bacon, *New Organon*, book II, aphorisms iv and v. "The advent of mechanical philosophies in the seventeenth century is usually supposed to have sounded the death knell of alchemy. . . . However, the single example of Boerhave is sufficient to cast grave doubt on the proposition. Herman Boerhave (1664–1734) is usually considered to be the first great rational chemist, imbued with the Newtonian philosophy, a thorough-going experimentalist and careful empiricist. Indeed he was all of those things, but he still believed in transmutation also." (Betty Jo Teeter Dobbs, *The Foundations of Newton's Alchemy*, Cambridge University Press, 1975, p. 44). Dobbs' fascinating study amply confirms Lessing's sense that occasional, even frequent, chicanery should not make us deny the genuine questing for *Wirklichkeit* of the "Free Masons." Clearly, Falk is often made to speak of Freemasonry as though it were natural science in process of formation. I do not know why Lessing never mentions Lavoisier. Kant (as far as I know) doesn't either.

FALK The mystery of Freemasonry is, as I told you before, something the Mason *cannot* utter, even supposing the possibility of his *wanting* to do so. Whereas little secrets are things perfectly sayable which at certain times and in certain lands were concealed from envy, held back because of fear, kept covert for prudential reasons.

ERNST For instance?

FALK For instance this matter of the connection between the Knights Templar and the Freemasons. Perhaps there was a time when it was needful and good to take no notice of it. Today, contrarywise, much harm may be done by keeping it a secret. Much better if it were openly admitted and the pertinent respect in which the Knights Templar were the Freemasons of their day determined.[8]

ERNST May I hear of this point of likeness?

FALK Read the history of the Knights Templar attentively. You are bound to make it out, which is why there was no need for your becoming a Freemason.

ERNST I wish I were among the books in my library! If I guess right, will you tell me?

FALK You won't be needing such confirmation. But to return to my either/or. Its decision turns on the very thing we're talking about: If all those Masons who today are big with Knights Templar see and feel the true point of likeness (*diesen rechten Punkt*), all is well with them, and with the world. Blessings upon all their work and upon all that they abstain from doing! But if they are blind and insensitive to it (*jenen Punkt*), if they let themselves be seduced by a mere homonym, if it was only *the Free Mason who works at that great temple* who reminded them of the Knights Templar, if they are merely infatuated with the red cross on the while mantle, if all that they are after is fat prebends for themselves and for their friends, then. . . . Then I pray that Heaven grant us an ample supply of pity so that we'll be able to hold in our laughter.

ERNST I notice that you are capable of anger and bitterness after all.

8. I'd love to be told *what* point of resemblance between the Templars and the Masons Lessing had in mind. Two things occur to me—the Templars' role as international financiers and bankers, and the rumor that they were heretics somehow connected with the Cathars and thus, ultimately, with the teaching that *all* men are saved in the end, even if this might mean metempsychosis for those who have not yet become the vehicle for the Paraclete. The characterization of the Knight Templar in Lessing's *Nathan the Wise*, especially when taken together with Lessing's verbal endorsement of metempsychosis in *On the Education of Mankind*, may bear out that Lessing was thinking of the Templars as *early critics of Trinitarian Christianity*. The Encyclopedia Brittanica (eleventh ed.) speaks to the point of *economic resemblance* in a footnote to the entry "Templars":

> The Paris Temple was the centre of the world's money market. In it popes and kings deposited their revenues, and these vast sums were not hoarded but issued as loans on adequate security. Above all it was the Templars who made the exchange of money with the East possible. It is easy, indeed, to see how they were the ideal bankers of the age; their strongholds were scattered from Armenia to Ireland, their military power and strict discipline ensured the safe transmission of treasure, while their reputation as monks guaranteed their integrity. Thus they became the predecessors, and later the rivals, of the great Italian banking companies (xxvi, 595).

FALK Quite capable, unfortunately. Thank you for that remark. I am cold again, like ice.

ERNST Which of the two conditions you described do you take to be that of our gentleman?

FALK The latter, I'm afraid. I wish I were mistaken. But how can I be, seeing that they've hit on the crazy notion of reviving the Order of Knight Templar? That major respect in which the Templars were the Freemasons of their day no longer applies. Europe at least is way past it and no longer needs that sort of headstart. So what are they after? Do they want to become the new absorbent sponge for the great to squeeze?[9] But why am I asking you these questions, and about what people am I asking? You didn't say that these alchemical or necromancing or Knight Templar-schemes are taken up by the older members of the order, by anyone who isn't a child or else a man whom nothing stops from child abuse, did you? You couldn't have! Children grow up. Let them be. Suffice it that, as already said, in these children's toys I see the weapons that grown men will some day wield with a sure hand.

ERNST Friend, what depresses me so isn't really this sort of childishness. Even without, like you, taking it as foreshadowing anything serious, I disregard it as a mere diversionary tactic. What bothers me is that I neither see nor hear about anything else, that no one is the least bit interested in the kind of thing you raised my hope for. No matter whom I talk to, never and nowhere do I meet with anything except blank silence when I try those themes.

FALK What are you talking about?

ERNST I am talking about equality. That equality which you cited as a constitutional principle of the order, that equality which filled my soul with the unforeseen hope that I might breathe its air at last among men who know how to get past social stratification without doing injury to their neighbor.

FALK Well?

ERNST Does it still exist? Did it ever? Let an enlightened Jew ask for acceptance. "A Jew? That will not do. Clearly the candidate must be a Christian." *What sort of Christian is indifferent.* "Regardless of religious distinctions" merely means "without discriminating among the three officially tolerated denominations in the Holy Roman Empire.[10] Is that your interpretation too, Falk?

9. The order of Knights Templar was, at the instance of Philip IV, King of France, dissolved by the Pope early in the fourteenth century and the Templars' holdings—in France, Spain, and England—confiscated.

10. Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist. The banning of Christian sectarianism in Masonic lodges was, of course, great progress—by Enlightenment standards. The reason for Ernst and Falk's not being satisfied may be touched on by Jacob Katz (*Jews and Freemasons* . , 22). Whereas (see note 16, p. 69 above) the *English and American Freemasons* were "strict constructionists" of the Grand Lodge Constitution, the *German Masons* added bylaws when undesirables applied:

> Only a Christian is eligible for membership in our *ehrwürdigen* order, but on no account Jews, Moslems, or Pagans. Lodges which have admitted any of these to their community have thereby clearly shown that they have no knowledge of the nature of Freemasonry.

FALK No, I see it differently.

ERNST Suppose a trusty cobbler comes along, a man who while working at his last has sufficient leisure to think many a good thought. Let him ask to be accepted. They'll turn him down even if he be a Jacob Boehme or a Hans Sachs.[11] "A cobbler?" they'll say, "why, clearly, a cobbler. . . ." Or imagine that a faithful, seasoned, much-tried manservant ask for acceptance. They'll say "That sort of person, who is not at liberty to choose the colors of his coat, does not belong.[12] We are such good company amongst ourselves."

FALK Just how good *is* the company?

ERNST Nothing wrong with it at all, except that one gets tired of moving in nothing but the right social circles—princes, dukes, lords, officers, councillors of every variety, merchants, artists. Sure, all these folk meet and greet each other at the lodges without distinction of rank. But at bottom they all belong to the same social rank, which is, unfortunately. .

FALK Things were different in my day. Still—I don't know. I can only guess. It's been too long since I was connected with any lodge. But don't you think there is a difference between not being admitted to a *lodge* for the time being and being excluded from *Freemasonry*?[13]

One reason for my deeming this somewhat recondite fact worth recording is that it seems to me possible that the American emphasis on *written constitutions* (state or federal) is connected with Masonic experience. It is, after all, *not entirely* true that the raising up of men of a certain kind has *nothing* to do with respect for a written constitution. Compare Eva Brann, *Paradoxes of Education in a Republic*, p. 102, and a lecture by Robert A. Goldwin entitled "James Madison and the Bill of Rights: Something More than a Change of Mind," St. John's College, Annapolis, September 30, 1983.

11. Hans Sachs (1494–1576) is the shoemaker-poet who is the hero of Wagner's *Master Singers at Nuremberg*. Jakob Boehme (1575–1624), likewise a shoemaker, is better known as the author of the mystic treatises *Aurora oder die Morgenröte im Aufgang* (*Aurora or the Crack of Dawn*) and *Theologia Germania*. I have not read these books, but from secondary literature I infer that there is a sting in the observation that Boehme would be excluded from German lodges, since his teachings contributed to Masonic spirituality.

12. See C. B. MacPherson, *Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, appendix on social classes and franchise classes in England around 1648. Philip Roth, in *Masonry in the Formation of Our Government* (Wisconsin, 1927) cites a remark of President Theodore Roosevelt in the July 1909 issue of McClure Magazine which bears on the justice of Ernst's expectations:

> I violate no secret when I say that one of the greatest values in Masonry is that it affords an opportunity for men in all walks of life to meet on common ground, where all men are equal and have one common interest. For example, when I was President, the Master was a worshipful brother Doughty, gardener of the estate of one of my neighbors and a most excellent public-spirited citizen with whom I liked to maintain contact. Clearly, I could not call upon him when I came home. It would have embarassed him. Neither could he, without embarassment, call on me. In the Lodge it was different. He was over me, though I was President, and it was good for him and good for me (Roth, p. 134).

13. My guess is that "lodge" stands for what people normally mean by Freemasonry; also for "philosophe" in the sense of Diderot *et al.* "Freemasonry" stands for Philosophy "as an eternal possibility," to use Strauss' phrase (cited p. 3 above). The enigmatic sentences about Freemasonry becoming "economized" and "politicized" harmonize with this interpretation.

ERNST How so?

FALK Because of the analogy that lodge stands to Freemasonry as church stands to faith. Nothing, absolutely nothing about the faith of the members can be inferred from the church's external prosperity. Quite the reverse: There is a kind of prosperity that would only by miracle be compatible with genuine faith. Indeed, history shows that the prosperity of the church and the faith of its members have always been at odds with each other, the one has always destroyed the other. And so I am afraid that. . . .

ERNST What?

FALK The goings on at lodges today are, from what I'm told, quite beyond me. This keeping of accounts, accumulating of capital, these efforts to squeeze out the last percentage of profit, this desire to buy into partnerships, this going after royal and princely licenses, the using of princely authority and might to suppress brethren who observe rites different from the ones that some want to turn into the only genuine rites—these things must end in fiasco. I hope I am a false prophet.

ERNST What's going to come of it all? The state no longer interferes much; anyway, there are already too many Freemasons amongst those who make or maintain its laws for. . . .[14]

FALK Good! Supposing that the Masons no longer need fear even the state, how in your opinion, is this going to affect them? Doesn't it put them right back where they started? Doesn't it stop them from being what they mean to be? I'm not sure you quite understand me.

ERNST Keep talking.

FALK Although . . . sure nothing lasts for ever. Perhaps Providence selected precisely this course of events to make an end of the present scheme of Freemasonry.

ERNST "Scheme of Freemasonry"?

FALK Scheme, husk, guise.

ERNST I still don't follow.

FALK Surely you don't suppose that Freemasonry has always played the Masonic part?

ERNST What are you talking about?

FALK I'm asking you whether you hold that what Freemasonry *is* has always been *called* so? (translator's italics) But look, it's going on supper-time. My guests are arriving. You'll stay, won't you?

ERNST I did not intend to, but clearly I must, since a twofold nourishment is waiting for me.

FALK Hush, none of that at table.

14. Frederick the Great of Prussia, for example, was initiated into the Brunswick Lodge. Newton's friend and apostle, John Theophilus Desaguliers (1683–1744), officiated at the ceremony.

FIFTH CONVERSATION

ERNST They've left at last. What babblers! You seem not to have noticed—perhaps you didn't want to?—that the one with the wart on his chin—who cares about his name?—is a Mason. He kept knocking.[15]

FALK Yes, I heard him. From his harangues I gathered, as you may not have, that he is one of those who in Europe fight for the Americans.[16]

ERNST That's the least of his faults.

FALK He fancies that the American congress is a Masonic lodge and that the Freemasons are *there* at last establishing their realm by force of arms.

ERNST *That kind of dreamer* exists as well?[17]

15. Masons have secret signs of recognition—the special handshake at the beginning of the Fourth Conversation, the special knock here. The knocking reminds me of how, in World War II, we used the · · · —of the Morse Code (and of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony!) to identify ourselves. Compare also Jacques Chailley, *The Magic Flute, Masonic Opera* (Knopf, New York, 1971).

16. The American War for Independence must have been a touchy subject, since Duke Charles, to fill the Brunswick treasury, had sold a substantial number of his male subjects to England to fight against the rebel American colonists. Duke Charles, Duke Frederick, the Crown Prince—all were Masons. But so were George III, King of England, and General Washington! To claim, on that account, that Freemasonry simply drops out of the equation, is empty, would be a mistake.

The Great Seal of the United States, designed in the eighteenth century (adopted June 20, 1782), is imprinted with Masonic insignia (which are reproduced on our one-dollar bills at the instance of Franklin D. Roosevelt, who hesitated only because he feared American Roman Catholics might be offended by this open declaration, see Washington *Post*, Nov. 9, 1982, p. D7). The ceremony of laying the corner stone of the United States Capitol in Washington was under the auspices of the Grand Lodge of Maryland (a painting by Stanley Massey Arthurs depicting George Washington in full Masonic regalia while laying the corner stone used to hang in the gallery of the Acadia Mutual Life Insurance company in Washington). According to a plaque at the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Museum in Baltimore, no important public work was started in the United States of America without an appropriate Masonic ceremony. At the opening of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, Charles Carroll threw the first symbolic spadeful of soil and members of the Grand Lodge of Maryland laid the first stone, which was first measured with the appropriate instruments. After three grand masters from the States of Maryland, Delaware, and Pennsylvania had pronounced the stone suitable for use in the ceremony—"I pronounce this stone well formed, true, and trusty"—the stone was laid into place, anointed with oil and wine and scattered with grain. Then benedictions were said. Charles Carroll, the last surviving signer of the Declaration of Independence, said to a friend, after he had, on July 4, 1828, moved the first shovelful of earth with a silver spade at the cornerstone laying ceremony: "I consider this among the most important acts of my life, second only to the signing of the Declaration of Independence, if indeed it be second to that." Carroll had been one of the original projectors of the Railroad and a heavy investor in its stock.

According to Bernard Faÿ (a professor of American Studies at the Sorbonne who sent thousands of French Freemasons to their death in World War II and was tried and convicted as a collaborator with the Germans at the war's end) all the staff officers General Washington trusted and all the leading army generals were Masons (*Revolution and Freemasonry: 1689–1800*, Little Brown, 1935; see also Philip A. Roth, *Masonry in the Formation of Our Government, 1761–1799*; and the books of Margaret C. Jacob).

17. Where the Fourth Conversation speaks of scientific dreams, the Fifth, as in this passage, speaks of political dreams. That these two were at least *psychologically* connected for the men who

FALK Unavoidably.

ERNST From what do you conclude that he is given to such notions?

FALK From a trait which will eventually become more conspicuous to you as well.

ERNST God, if I knew that I have been so much deceived in the Freemasons!

FALK Don't fret. The Freemason calmly waits for the sun to rise and leaves the lights on in the meantime, allowing them to shine for as long as they want to and are able. It's not his way to snuff the candles and when they are extinguished suddenly to realize that the stubs must be relit or other light provided.

ERNST That's how I see it: "What costs blood is sure not to deserve it."[18]

FALK Excellent! Now ask what you will. I must answer you.

ERNST Then there will be no end of questions.

---

made the modern world is, as I urged earlier, shown by the work of Frances Yates, not only her Bruno book but also *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972). What welcoming modernity meant is, perhaps, learned by studying what staving it off amounted to. For this purpose Henry Kamen's *The Spanish Inquisition* (Signet, 1965), especially chapter 7, is very helpful.

18. Von Olshausen attributes the saying to Franklin, but without explaining why. Obviously, Lessing here uses it to have Ernst declare himself an opponent of revolution by force. Hence Falk's enthusiastic response "Now ask what you will. I must answer you."

Precisely where Lessing stood politically is not easy to make out. I have, so far, found only *two* outright political statements: In a frequently cited letter to Nicolai (25 August, 1769) he pokes fun at the supposed liberty of thought and publication in Frederick the Great's Berlin, saying that this liberty is limited to silly tirades against religion "of which an honest man ought to be ashamed." "Just try writing about other things with the same freedom! . . . Let's see someone in Berlin raising his voice in behalf of the rights of [Frederick's] subjects, protesting against their being fleeced and against [royal] despotism, as some in France and Denmark do even now. Then you'll find out what country is until this day the most slavish land in Europe." In the sentences I omitted from the translation, Lessing indicates that he believes Catholic Vienna is a freeer place than Frederick's Berlin. The other passage is from his private notes. Its heading is "Deutsche Freiheit" (German freedom), V.724f.

That Lessing did not adore Frederick is shown by the report that he declined the post of Professor of Rhetoric at the University of Koenigsberg (Kant's university!) because it involved the obligation to deliver a yearly eulogy to the king. It is confirmed by the poem (if that is what it should be called), "To Mr. Gleim" (I.146):

> You [Gleim] know best how to sing for him [Frederick]. I, meanwhile, want, with Aesopian timidity, a friend to animals, to teach a more quiet wisdom—a fable about the bloodthirsty tiger. . . . (The syntactic ambiguity of the second sentence is in the original).

One must, then, infer Lessing's political opinions, chiefly from his "aesthetic" works—the *Hamburg Dramaturgy*, the Correspondence about Tragedy, the Fables, the plays, and (of course) the "theological" writings.

Properly read, all the major plays are on political themes: *Emilia Galotti* is a transformed, "bourgeois," version of Livy's (III.44–58) Virginia theme, set in Italy, but applicable to any of the three-hundred-odd courts of Germany. *Nathan the Wise*, as I tried to show in a forthcoming essay, "On the Wisdom of Nathan," is about "modernity," not just about religious toleration. *Samuel Henzi*, a tragedy of which, unfortunately, only fragments exist, deals with a failed revolution in the city of Bern. That, according to Lessing's lay-out of the *muthos*, the revolution fails because *non-citizens use* it to achieve ends of *private vengeance* is worthy of note. The historic course of events in Bern is described in Beaujour, Offler, Potter, *A Short History of Switzerland*, 201f. *Minna von Barnhelm* cannot help but somehow "deal with" the Seven Years War.

FALK Only you don't know where to start?

ERNST Did I or didn't I understand you just before we were interrupted? Were you or weren't you contradicting yourself? Because when in an earlier conversation you said that *Freemasonry has always existed* I understood you to mean that not only its essence but also its present organization date back to hoary ages.

FALK As though both were in the same case! The essence of Freemasonry is as old as civil society. The two could not arise except *together*, if indeed civil society isn't merely an offshoot of Freemasonry: The flame at the focus is still due to the sun.[19]

ERNST That's how it dimly looks to me too.

FALK But whether their relation be that of mother and daughter or of sisters, the fate of either has always affected that of the other. Whatever the condition of civil society anywhere, such too was the condition of Freemasonry, and vice versa. The most reliable indication of the soundness and strength of a state has always been whether or not it permitted Freemasonry to flourish by its side. Just as it is to this day an unmistakeable sign of a state's weakness and timidity if it won't tolerate openly what it must, willingly or not, tolerate covertly.

ERNST To wit, Freemasonry?

FALK Of course. Because at bottom it does not depend on *external ties*, which so easily degenerate into *civil ordinances*; it depends rather on the community feeling of minds attuned to one another.

ERNST And who would dare to legislate about that!

FALK Which does not take away from the fact that Freemasonry has always and everywhere been obliged to accommodate itself to the format of civil society, which has always been the stronger association. As many as were the forms of civil society, so many, necessarily, were the forms of Freemasonry, each of these, of course, receiving a new name. How could you have imagined that the name was older than the ruling political way of thought for which it was tailor-made?[19]

ERNST What is that ruling way of thought?

FALK I leave the question to your own investigation. Suffice it to say that the name "Freemasonry" did not become applied to members of our secret brotherhood until the beginning of this century. The name does not reliably occur in any printed work of earlier date and I dare anyone to show me an older document even in handwritten form.

ERNST You are talking about the German version of the name, aren't you?

19. Despite the comparative rarity of references to Platonic dialogues in Lessing's *œuvre*, it is hard to read this passage otherwise than as saying of the light in the cave, the *city* hearth, that it derives from the sun, the *cosmic* hearth. (Similar imagery can be found in Harvey's *On the Circulation of the Blood*.) Thus the mother–daughter or sisterly relation of Freemasonry and civil society would be a stand-in for philosophy-science's relation to politics. "*Herrschende Denkungsart der Staate*" sounds to me like the true original for Strauss' word "regime."

FALK No, I mean the original English name "Freemason" along with all subsequent translations of it.

ERNST You can't be serious. Reconsider. The name occurs in no printed work prior to this century, none?

FALK None!

ERNST Yet I have myself. . .

FALK Some of the dust that still hasn't settled got into your eyes too?

ERNST But what about the passage in. . . .

FALK In Londinopolis?[20] That's what you mean, isn't it? Dust!

ERNST How about the Acts of Parliament under Henry VI?[21]

FALK Dust!

ERNST And the Great Privileges granted to the Gothenberg Lodge by Charles XI, King of Sweden?[22]

FALK Dust!

ERNST And Locke?

FALK Which Locke do you have in mind?

ERNST The philosopher, his letter to the Earl of Pembroke, the notes of a hearing, written in Henry VI's own hand.[23]

FALK That must be an entirely new find, of which I haven't heard. But no, Henry VI again? Dust, nothing but dust!

ERNST It can't be!

FALK What would you call these word twistings and sham documents?

ERNST How could they have gotten away with such deception with all the world's eyes upon them?

FALK Easy. There never are enough sensible people around for those few to contradict every piece of nonsense from its inception. Enough if they don't let it persist. Obviously, not to have nonsense foisted on the public at all would be better. Because precisely the most despicable nonsense can, being so despicable that nobody bothers to fight it, acquire an air of the serious and sacred in the course of time. And so, after an interval of a thousand years people say: "Would this have been allowed to circulate in written form if it weren't true? No one contradicted these trustworthy men then. Do you want to contradict them now?"

ERNST Oh history, history. What are you?

FALK Anderson's callow rhapsody, in which the history of the building arts is given out as the history of the Masonic order, is not so bad. Perhaps it was good for something in its day. Besides, the fraud was easily detected. But that

20. James Howell's *Londinopolis* (London, 1657) may be meant.

21. Henry's reign stretches from 1422 to 1461. The Acts of Parliament referred to allude to assemblies of stonemasons.

22. 1660–1697.

23. See William Preston's *Illustrations of Masonry* (London, 1772). Cf. Lessing's letter to Joachim Heinrich Campe of October, 1778.

people should continue to build on such marshy ground, that they should maintain *in print* what they'd be ashamed to say *viva voce* to a serious man, that to keep a joke going which should have been dropped long ago they even resort to *forgery*, a forgery for which they would have been put in the stocks if some minor civil matter had been at issue. . .

ERNST But mightn't more than just a play on words be involved? What if it were true that from of old the secret of the order has chiefly been preserved by the homonymous craft?

FALK *If* it were true! (translator's italics)

ERNST Mustn't it be? Why else should the order borrow its symbols precisely from this craft, why not from some other?

FALK An appealing question!

ERNST There must be an explanation of the fact.

FALK There is.

ERNST But not the one I offered?

FALK No. An entirely different one.

ERNST Am I supposed to guess or will you tell me?

FALK If a while back you had asked me quite another question, one that I was waiting for, you'd easily come up with the answer now.

ERNST What question were you waiting for me to ask?

FALK When I told you that Freemasonry has not always borne that name, wasn't it only natural immediately to ask. . . .

ERNST What other name it has had? Quite. So I ask the question now.

FALK You want to know what Freemasonry was called before it was called "Freemasonry." I answer, "masony."

ERNST Sure, the English name . . .

FALK No, the English name was not *masonry* but *masony*, deriving not from *mason*, worker in stone, but from *mase*, table or tablet.

ERNST *Mase* meaning table? In what language?

FALK In the language of the Anglosaxons, but in that of the Goths and Franks as well; so the word is German originally. Even today a number of compound words formed from it are in common use, or were till recently, for instance *Maskopie, masleidig, Masgenosse*.[24] In Luther's day *Masonei* was still familiar but its good meaning became altered to a worse.

ERNST I know nothing about either a good or a bad sense of the word.

FALK Still, you do know of the custom of our forefathers to deliberate about the most important matters while at table. *Mase* refers to table and *Masonei* to a

24. *Maskopie* means, according to Kruger's note, "trading company" or *koinonia* more broadly understood; *masleidig* means "to lack an appetite"; *Masgenosse* is another word for *Tischgenosse*, one of the company gathered for the meal. Surely, the Latin *mensa* (still used at continental universities to refer to the student dining hall) is in the background. But is *mass* (the Lord's Supper as a supper of fellowship) entirely absent?

private supper party. How a private supper party turned into a drinking party (which is how Agricola understands the word)[25] is easily seen.

ERNST Is *that* what happened to the word "lodge"? (translator's italics)

FALK But earlier, before some masonies degenerated in this way and lost their good repute, they were held in the highest regard. Not a court in Germany, large or small, but had one. To this fact the old songbooks and histories testify. Masonies had their own buildings, often adjoining to or near the castles and palaces of the ruling prince. The building's name, so often today erroneously attributed, derived from this connection. What more need I say of the celebrity of these supper clubs than that the society of the *round table* was the first and oldest, from which all others spring.

ERNST The round table? That goes back to a quite fabulous antiquity. . .

FALK The story of King Arthur may be a fable but the round table is not.

ERNST Wasn't Arthur the one who established it?

FALK By no means, not even according to the fable. Arthur or his father took it over from the Anglosaxons, as the name "masony" suggests. And isn't it more than likely that the Anglosaxons brought only such customs to England as they also left behind in their original fatherland? Besides, other Germanic nations of that day had the same penchant for forming smaller, more intimate, groups in the context of the greater civil society.

ERNST What are you trying to tell me?

FALK All that I now say in brief and perhaps without the necessary qualifications I promise to document next time, when we are both in the city and have access to my books. For the present, hear me out as you would the first rumor of some great event. Let curiosity be piqued rather than satisfied.

ERNST Where did you leave off?

FALK Masony, then, was a German custom which the Saxons transplanted to England. There is some disagreement among scholars on the question who the *Thanes of the Masony*[26] were. Presumably they were its nobles. At any rate, masony struck such deep root in the new soil that it hung on under all changes of regime and every once in a whole rose to flourishing condition. The twelfth- and thirteenth-century masonies of the Knights Templar became especially famous. It was such a templar masony which, despite the dissolution of the order, maintained itself in London until the end of the seventeenth century. And here begins the period which, though undocumented in written history, is nevertheless attested to by a tradition so carefully preserved and marked by so many signs of

25. Krueger cites entry 668 of Johann Agricola's *Anthology of Proverbs*, "*Es gehet zu wie in König Artus' Hofe.*" Agricola's explanatory note to this entry ("They're carrying on as at King Arthur's court") remarks that the assembly of knights used to be called the *Round Table or Masony* (*die Tafelrunde oder die Messenei*). In case this isn't obvious—Arthur's table was *round* to eliminate *ranking*!

26. "Thane" (as in Macbeth's "Thane of Cawdor") is in the German text.

trusworthiness that the tradition may substitute for the written history that is lacking.[27]

ERNST What stands in the way of turning this tradition at last into history by means of documentary proof?

FALK What stands in the way? Nothing. There is much to be said for it. At lest, I feel, I feel justified, even obligated, to disclose this history, to you and to all who are in your position.

ERNST Well, then, out with it. I am all ears.

FALK As I said, this templar masony was still in existence in London at the end of the seventeenth century. Its meeting house stood in the vicinity of St. Paul's Cathedral, which was then undergoing alteration. The master builder of this second church of the entire world was . . .[28]

27. The Glorious Revolution, *bloodlessly* removing James II from office and establishing William of Orange on the throne in his stead (cf "Franklin's saying," p. 47 above), may have been "assisted" by men who moved in the same circles as did Locke and the members of the Royal Society. For a brief account of some of the circumstances surrounding the Revolution of 1689, see G. M. Trevelyan, *A Shortened History of England* (Penguin), pp. 348ff. See also three books of Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution* (New York, Norton, 1966), *The World Upside Down* (Penguin, 1978), *Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1965). For what comes afterwards, see Margaret C. Jacobs, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons, and Republicans* (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1981). On *my* reading of the history of Freemasonry, "radicalism" is, precisely, what the *Founders* were trying to avert! See p. 5 above of the Translator's Introduction.

28. The German reads "*Der Baumeister dieser zweiten Kirche der ganzen Welt.*" The *first* "church of the whole world" was, of course, St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, dedicated in 1626. Christopher Wren, according to John Aubrey's *Natural History of Wiltshire*, p. 277, was adopted as a Masonic brother on Monday, May 18, 1691. Wren was indeed the designer of the *new* St. Paul's Cathedral in London. He was also a vehement royalist.

Christopher Wren's original design for the remodeling of London's St. Paul's was, I am told, an imitation of Hadrian's Pantheon. The Pantheon may also have served as model for the first building *designed* to be a library: It used to stand in Wolfenbüttel. Leibniz is said to have conceived it, as a sort of "library temple." It was to house the books and manuscripts of the Herzog-August-Bibliothek, where Leibniz, and later Lessing, were curators (see "Das Gebäude der Herzog-August-Bibliothek . . ." in W. Totok and C. Haase, *Leibniz: sein Leben, sein Wirken, und seine Zeit*, Hanover, 1966). The House of Hanover, which ascended to the throne of England, was a sprig of the House of Brunswick! I imagine that this is why Gibbon took an interest in the House of Brunswick, and wrote a history of it. Allow me to mention one other curious tidbit: The first English grammar school *not under church or royal* management stood by St. Paul's, and bore its name. The London Mercers' Guild supported it, and John Colet, Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral and Erasmus' friend and mentor, was its headmaster. According to Frederic Seebohm's *The Oxford Reformers: John Colet, Erasmus and Thomas More* (London, Longmans, Green, 1913), Colet's educational mission (he gave his life and fortune to the school that he re-founded) was born of Colet's meeting, in Italy, with Pico della Mirandola. (On Pico's influence I tried to comment briefly in a Note on Eva Brann's "Roots of Modernity," *St. John's Review*, 1985).

I imagine that the extraordinarily complicated history of the re-education of mankind would be greatly illuminated if a really knowledgeable student of architecture got going on it. Can there really be much doubt that the wealth of neoclassical architecture—in the United States, England, and on the Continent—has something to do with the fact that Machiavelli's teaching to re-vive pre-Christian Rome "took"?

Despite the fact that architectural *imagery* is favored by Lessing too and that he picks an architect,

ERNST Christopher Wren. . .

FALK You have just named the creator of the whole of modern Freemasonry . !

ERNST Him?

FALK Briefly put, Wren, the master builder of the Cathedral of St. Paul's, in the vicinity of which an extremely ancient masony used to assemble since time immemorial, was a member of this masony and during the thirty years of St. Paul's reconstruction he visited it regularly.

ERNST I begin to smell a misunderstanding.

FALK What else? The true meaning of the word "masony" had been forgotten by the English people, got lost. A masony hard by so important a building venture, so regularly frequented by the master builder, what else could it be than a "masonry," a society of men skilled in the art of architecture, with whom Wren consulted about architectural problems?

ERNST A perfectly natural inference.

Christopher Wren, as Founder of the Masonic society, Lessing did not, as far as I can see, appreciate that *buildings themselves* were meant to serve in the re-education of mankind, that the passion for architecture that seized hold of men since the Renaissance is to be taken "straight" *as well as* in a transposed sense. What prompts me to say this is, for instance, the fact that Sir Henry Wotton, the diplomat who served James VI of Scotland, later James I of England, and who apparently hoped to win Venice to the Protestant cause, authored a perfectly delightful handbook on architecture. Bacon, in the *Essays*, has an essay on *buildings* side by side with one on *gardens*. If Lessing *had* seen things "my" way, would he have written off Anderson's history as a *mere* "rhapsody"? Anderson (or Desaguliers, who is mentioned by name as the Deputy Grand Master at the end of the Dedication to the Duke of Montagu, and pictured, in clergyman's dress, in the prefatory engraving) writes:

> Nor should we forget the learned island of Sicily, where the prodigious geometrician Archimedes did flourish and was unhappily slain when Syracuse was taken by Marcellus, the Roman general. For from Sicily as well as from Greece, Egypt, and Asia the ancient Romans learnt both the science and the art, what they knew before being either mean or irregular. But as they subdued the nations, they made mighty discoveries in both, and like wise men, they led captive, not the body of the people, but the arts and sciences along with the most eminent professors and practitioners, to Rome, which thus became the center of learning, as well as of imperial power, until they advanced to their zenith of glory under Augustus Caesar (in whose reign was born God's Messiah, the great architect of the church).

Augustus Caesar is given the title "Grand Master of the Lodge at Rome" and the Augustan style of architecture is recommended as "the pattern and standard of true masonry in all future times." (*Constitution of the Freemasons, 1723: Reproduced in Facsimile with an Introduction by Lionel Vibert I.C.S. (retired), Past Master of the Lodge of Quatuor Coronati* (Bernard Quaritch, London, 1923, pp. 24f). Some pages below the "history" continues as follows:

> . . the great care that the Scots took of true masonry proved afterwards very useful to England, for the learned and magnanimous Queen Elizabeth, who encouraged other arts, discouraged this because, being a woman, she could not be made a Mason. . . . But upon her demise, King James VI, of Scotland, succeeding to the Crown of England, being a Mason King, revived the English lodges and as he was the first King of Great Britain, he was also the first Prince of the world that recovered the Roman architecture from the ruins of Gothic ignorance. . The Augustan style was raised from its rubbish in Italy . . . above all by the great Palladio, who has not yet been duly imitated in Italy, though justly rivaled in England by our great Master Mason, Inigo Jones (p. 38).

FALK All London was interested in getting progress reports on the construction of such a church. To get first hand information, all who deemed themselves to possess any building expertise would clamor for admission to the supposed masonry, and ask in vain. Finally—you know Christopher Wren, what sort of man he was, how inventive and energetic. Wren had earlier participated in the projecting of a scientific society that would make *speculative truths more directly efficacious in establishing the public good and in making civic life more commodious.*[29] Then it occurred to him that a society that *rose from the activities of daily life* (*Praxis des bügerlichen Lebens*) *to speculation* would be a fitting counterpart to it. "There," he thought, "men would investigate what truths are useful; here what useful things are true. What if I make some of the principles of masony exoteric? What if I hide the things that cannot be made exoteric under the hieroglyphics and symbols of the building craft? Why not enlarge what people now take to be the sense of the word "masonry" so that it becomes a Freemasonry in which a larger number can participate?" Thus thought Wren, and thereby Freemasonry sprang into being. How does that strike you?

ERNST I am dazzled.

FALK Do you see a little light now?

ERNST A little? Too much all of a sudden.

FALK Now do you understand . . .

ERNST I beg you, friend, no more. Don't you have urgent business in the city?

FALK Is that where you want me to be?

ERNST Want? After you promised to. . . .

FALK Well, then, there are a number of matters that require my attention there. Let me reiterate, relying on memory, I may have spoken too vaguely to satisfy you. But among my books you will see and seize hold. The sun is going down. You must be off to the city. Farewell.

ERNST One sun is setting, another rising. Farewell.

POSTSCRIPT

A sixth conversation between these friends does not lend itself to such imitation as was furnished for the preceding. Its essential matter will be given in the form

29. Lessing means the Royal Society. I do not know what to make of the fact that Lessing does not mention Bacon's role in the "projecting" of that society. Lessing's friend Nicolai is well aware of Bacon's status as the new Moses: In his remarkably careful historical investigation, "Über das Entstehen der Freymaurergesellschaft," Appendix to his *Versuch über die Beschuldigungen welche dem Templerorden gemacht worden* (1782, available at the University of Cincinnati), Nicolai anticipates many of the discoveries of Frances Yates in her book on the Rosicrucian "enlightenment." Since Lessing studied Diderot's works for the theatre, it is impossible for me to believe that he did not know how Bacon is spoken of in the *Encyclopedia*. Yet Nicolai, who can be presumed to know Lessing better than I ever shall, takes Lessing's "history" straight, including the bit about *masonry* and *masony*!

of critical notes to the fifth conversation. These notes are for the time being withheld.

Translator's Postscript

After this long and somewhat odd effort at translation and interpretation, I may be permitted to report that the history of this undertaking is as follows: For many years I tried to understand the modern epistemological enterprise, that of "founding" ἐπιστημή, accepting as intellectually obligatory the project of reconstituting δόξα on the "basis" of indubitables. I reached the conclusion that this enterprise, which supposes that all trust needs legitimizing, that we should doubt wholesale and believe retail, that the modality of matter of fact is never good enough but needs "grounding" in necessity, is incoherent.

In an effort to learn *why* this intellectual obligation so gripped my predecessors, I took up the question whether, perhaps, the metaphor of "foundations" should be probed. This made me notice that it was just one of a family of building images that runs through the writings of Bacon, Hobbes, Descartes, Kant, Harrington, Peirce, and many others.

Although it seemed to me that comparing the world to a temple and the heavens to a cupola has something "natural" about it, I came to believe that the founding fathers of modernity were deliberately deploying *inherited* uses of architectural imagery, which I found to have had a fairly prominent place in the Old Testament (2 Sam. 22, Ps. 102:25f., Ps. 78:67f., Ps. 104, Job 38, Isaiah 51, Ezekiel) the New Testament (Matthew 7:15f., Matthew 16:15f., Luke 6:46f., I Corinthians 3:11f., Ephesians 2:19, Hebrews 11:10), in Plato's *Statesman* and in Aristotle's *Politics*.

Having become aware of the political and religious contexts of the older building imagery, I thought it was unlikely that epistemology was intended as a value-neutral assignment (e.g., Peter King, Locke's nephew, writes in his *Life and Letters of John Locke*, p. 280: "In his [Locke's] noble zeal for liberty of thought, he dreaded the tendency of doctrines which might gradually prepare mankind to *'swallow that for an innate principle which may suit his purpose who teacheth them.'")*

Just when the conviction had taken hold of me that the new science, the new politics, and *Erkenntnistheorie* had originally been the *one* enterprise of *reconstituting the public world of men awake* (Heraclitus 237), I came upon Masonic snatches—the unfinished pyramid below the Eye of God on our one-dollar bills and the portrait of Washington mentioned in note 15. Thus I was led to take an interest in Freemasonry and, eventually, in Lessing's *Dialogues*. The fact that Harvey Flaumenhaft (to whom I owe the Carroll and Franklin D. Roosevelt cita-

tions), shared my sense that the story of the making of the modern world and the story of Freemasonry are intertwined encouraged me to make available such information as is contained in the notes. I also owe much to Cathy Berry, at the St. John's College Library, who patiently wrote away for materials only obtainable through interlibrary loan. Thanks, finally, are due to Gisela and Laurence Berns, who generously lent me books.